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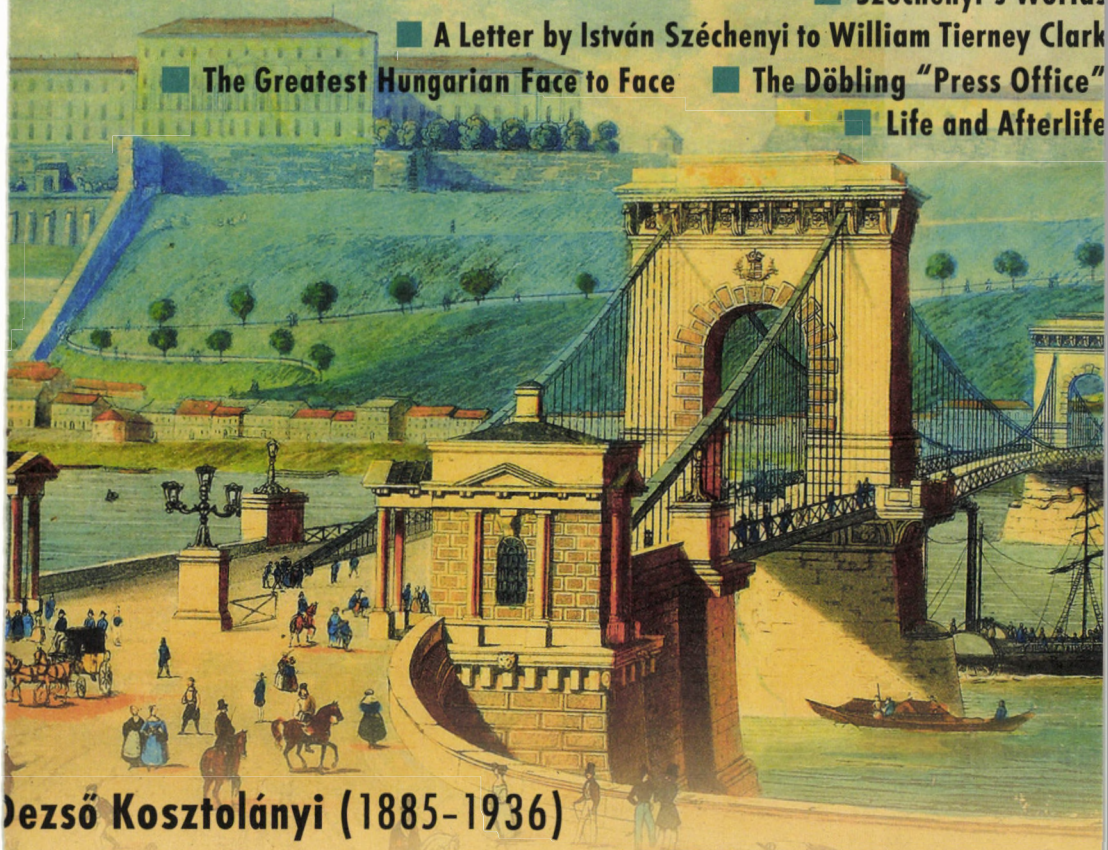

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IN MEMORIAM ISTVÁN SZÉCHENYI (1791–1860)

DEZSŐ KOSZTOLÁNYI (1885–1936)

FOUND IN TRANSLATION

ART

MUSIC

THEATRE & FILM

Cover: *Franz Eybl:* Count István Széchenyi, *1842, lithograph; Domokos Perlaska:* View of the Chain Bridge and the Buda Castle from the Bridgehead in Pest *(Detail), 1840s, coloured lithograph. Courtesy Hungarian Historical Gallery of the Hungarian National Museum*

Back cover: Dezső Kosztolányi, *1935. Photograph by László Székely (?)*

László Csorba

Széchenyi's Worlds

Sometimes I ponder on how to explain István Széchenyi's role in Hungarian history to an Englishman or an American. I might start with Christopher Columbus and his discovery of the New World. Well, Széchenyi discovered two worlds. First he described the medieval backwaters of his own country. Second he looked to England as the model state. Then he worked to transplant all the best English advances to Hungary.

I might equally throw Benjamin Franklin's hat into the ring. The printer, scientist, inventor and politician set his country on a path to modernity with wisdom and pragmatism. Széchenyi was no less a civilizer. Not only was Széchenyi a true teacher and statesman, he spelt out his plans in the books he wrote and put his money where his mouth was.

Nor should we forget George Washington, who led his country through its political struggles. Likewise Széchenyi took a political role, becoming a member of Hungary's first proper government in 1948. Even in ill health he acted on behalf of the community to which he belonged.

I might go on. But I've made my point: Széchenyi the man was of a dizzyingly high calibre and the political role he had to fulfill was an extraordinary challenge. He was a genius, the sort of man who does not fit well into ordinary shoes.

When my colleagues and I at the National Museum considered how to mount an exhibition as a fitting memorial to Count Széchenyi on the 150th anniversary

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László Csorba

is Director of the Hungarian National Museum and Associate Professor at the Department of Cultural History of Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest. His books and other publications are on 19th- and 20th-century Hungarian history, on modern church history as well as on the history of Italian–Hungarian cultural ties. He is the author of a monograph on István Széchenyi and was curator of the exhibition Széchenyi and His Worlds, *Hungarian National Museum, Budapest, 9 October 2010–6 March 2011 reviewed by Nóra Veszprémi on pp. 33–39 of this issue.*

Franz Sandmann, after Rudolf Alt: The Château at Nagycenk, built cca 1750, lithograph

Hungarian Historical Gallery of the Hungarian National Museum, Budapest

Széchenyi inherited the estate in 1820 and created a model farm. Between 1834 and 1840 he modernised the building, installing bathrooms etc. Széchenyi gave instructions concerning arrangements at the Nagycenk château even while confined in Döbling.

of his death, we found ourselves confronted by a real dilemma. Look at the images and documentation over the past century-and-a-half and it soon becomes clear that our predecessors pinned their own desires and ambitions on the Count: they buried whatever failed to fit their ideas of him and enlarged whatever suited their purposes. Efforts to uncover the "real" Széchenyi started to look like a fools' errand. Attempts in successive periods to "update" a figure must confront the problem that our vantage point of the past is fixed in the present. In the end we decided to avoid treating his life as a complete trajectory. Forget the "whole" Széchenyi and his "universe". Instead we'd examine Széchenyi's many worlds, especially those which teach us more about *our* world.

As visitors proceed from room to room, Széchenyi's worlds open up as they overlap and succeed one another.

The first room provides context and basic information. What did it mean to be born an immensely rich aristocrat in the Hungary of the 1790s? How can anyone whose native tongue is German become a Hungarian patriot? What could have motivated Széchenyi, who always treated his rank with aristocratic haughtiness? This did not mean profligacy, running up debts or frivolity. On the contrary, it signified moral seriousness, a sense of duty in the service of his country. How did being a Hungarian captain of hussars in the Habsburg imperial army on the battlefields of the Napoleonic wars, all the way from Győr via Leipzig, prepare him for his life? Just imagine: a captain of the hussars with one hundred men and two hundred horses at his disposal coming and going and obeying orders. Then there were the logistical questions to think of: quarters, food and drink, health and hygiene, not to mention his men and horses, training, transporting baggage, organising field kitchens and the perfecting of the science of war.

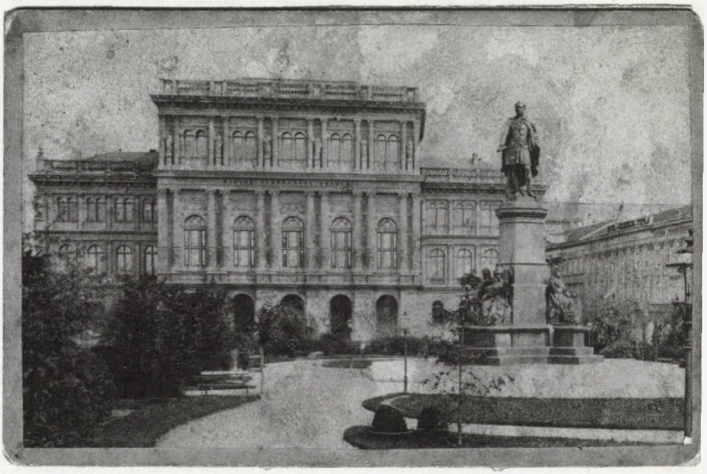
Széchenyi did all that. His ambition was to become a general but he failed to rise to the rank of major owing to the mistrust of Prince Metternich, the

prime mover of politics at the Habsburg court for forty years after 1801. But then what about the languages and learning which somehow stuck like leeches to him? His tutors regarded him as a poor student and so he threw himself with great fervour into the school of life. What about polite society, to say nothing of the glances of all those belles? What inspired such romantic dreams in a young man at the start of his career? In truth, he shilly-shallied for a long time to come in the bowers of love even when he was a statesman preparing to launch, for the good of his native land, plans which would shape its future.

Vincenz Katzler: The Foundation of the Academy, 1860, lithograph

At the 1825 Diet Széchenyi offered one year's revenues of his estates (60,000 Florins) towards the foundation of a Hungarian Scientific Society, later the Hungarian Academy.

Hungarian Historical Gallery of the Hungarian National Museum, Budapest



The statue of Széchenyi by József Engel in front of the Academy of Sciences, 1880s. Photographer unknown

Historical Photo Collection of the Hungarian National Museum, Budapest

In the second room of the exhibition the fully formed individual is seen at work. In this period, Hungary's Age of Reform (1825–1848), the Count was at the centre of public attention, a civilizer, "the great moving spirit of the feats of our age". You'd be hard put to show the whole scope of Széchenyi's activities[1], so it is worth picking just one: the Chain Bridge linking Buda and Pest, one of his grand projects whose details demonstrate how he came to grips with the moment and how broad his approach was. In the light of its magnificence, both as an

1 ■ For more on this on the pages of this journal see András Gergely, "Dreaming and Achieving. Széchenyi as Reformer". *The New Hungarian Quarterly,* No. 126, Summer 1992, pp. 107–122.

Széchenyi and Kossuth

Count István Széchenyi and Lajos Kossuth wrangled for almost two decades before the 1848 Revolution, chiefly in newspapers, though the Pest county assembly and the Diet were preferred arenas, too. Personal antagonism may have fuelled their quarrels, but issues such as how to liberate serfs, plan railway routes, choose tax-funded projects and so forth were at their core. Still, Kossuth did not let their discord get the better of his judgement: "Count Széchenyi was seized at an appropriate moment by the power of the needs of the age. He became the tongue of the age, giving words to the thoughts of the best of the nation. This is where the secret of his influence lies. Placing his fingers on the pulse of the age, he understood its beats. For that reason I consider him to be the greatest Hungarian."

The Count, however, completely misunderstood Kossuth. Even in the early 1840s Széchenyi regarded Kossuth as a Jacobin fighting at the barricades instead of the sober, mainstream politician he undoubtedly was.

What could have led to this error? Research suggests the Count's fears were fed by his own internal turmoil—they had no objective basis in the realities of the day. It cannot be said that Utopian fanatics had irresponsible plans during the Age of Reform or in the first independent government in 1848–49. Rather, those politicians felt driven to take exceptional measures: a war of self-defence foisted on them by the Habsburg dynasty which had broken its own pledge by repudiating laws to which the royal assent had been given in April 1848. Kossuth turned revolutionary out of necessity and against his own instincts. Széchenyi was no prophet who espied, a decade in advance, an irresponsible agitator who goaded his unfortunate generation into a failed revolution. It was Kossuth's opponents, with different ideas about how to build a modern civic society, who branded him in this way.

There is a near consensus among historians today that it was Kossuth, the editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Pesti Hírlap*, rather than Széchenyi, who formulated proposals for modern reforms such as how to emancipate the serfs most effectively. The reformist politicians who carried any weight—Ferenc Deák, József Eötvös, Miklós Wesselényi, Mihály Vörösmarty—had to admit that Kossuth was on the right side of the ongoing

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object and symbol, the bridge is perhaps the best known of all his schemes, a symbol of what was then modern Hungary. The technical aspects alone were staggering: a state-of-the-art structure so modern that the technology did not even exist a decade before for its construction. Its purpose was to enable the transport of goods and people between the two banks of a river, connecting what were then separate cities on opposite banks of the Danube—Buda, the traditional capital of the country, and Pest, the newly expanding economic centre. A new entity was forged, a modern Hungarian capital fit for concentrating the country's economic, scientific, intellectual, political and

dispute. Kossuth, a convinced democrat, declared emphatically that the age of automatic deference was over. The basis for reform, in the light of the broadening of democracy, was public opinion, which informed the process of transformation by participating in opinion-forming by deciding who to follow and, on a given issue, to what extent.

The dispute between the two intellectual giants carried on beyond the grave, as future generations co-opted and twisted the ideas of the respective opponents. Between the two world wars, Kossuth, a convinced democrat, was hardly an attractive model for official politics. The cult of Széchenyi, however, proclaimed as a timeless moving spirit of Hungarian history, could hardly have scaled greater heights. The tables were turned in 1948. The Communists also had a need for historical prototypes in order to get their dictatorship accepted as an organic part of Hungarian history. They regarded the Count as an aristocrat who had failed to transcend his "class-barriers", so the figure of Kossuth was massaged to suit their ends. For one thing, he was moulded into more of a "class warrior" than he was in reality. At the same time they denied that his name was synonymous with the war Hungary waged for independence. Yet it was precisely Kossuth, the democrat and fighter for independence, who became the guiding star of Hungary's 1956 revolution, regarded as such by none other than Imre Nagy, the martyr prime minister. After that revolution was suppressed, the new regime under János Kádár was unable to appropriate either the "fake" Kossuth of their predecessors, the Communists under Mátyás Rákosi, or the "true" Kossuth of Imre Nagy. New heroes were needed. At Party Headquarters people suddenly realised that by "rediscovering" Széchenyi they could kill two birds with one stone: the Count's criticism of Kossuth as a rash, "bad revolutionary" came as a godsend, whereas the politician who said: let's not preoccupy ourselves with belonging to an empire; let's focus instead on our home ground and carry out limited modernisation, improve living conditions etc, was hailed as the new exemplar. Behind the Count's portrait loomed Kádár, the proponent of "goulash Communism". Those who push the Széchenyi–Kossuth dispute too far these days are perhaps unaware that they are still servicing the covert goals of the one-time Party. The dispute will only be concluded when no one is left to project the most burning problems of his own age on to it in order to suit their own purposes. ❧

L. Cs.

cultural energies. (The formal union of the separate cities of Buda, Pest and Óbuda eventually took place in 1873 fulfilling Széchenyi's vision). As envisioned by Széchenyi, the new city could have become the most highly developed economic centre in the whole Habsburg monarchy, a central distribution point in global commerce along the Danube for the eastward transport of Western goods. (For that to be possible, of course, the Danube had to be made navigable all the year round, another Széchenyi project, which meant blasting a channel through the Iron Gates, where the river broke the spine of the Carpathians on its way to the Black Sea.)

The idea was to transform the economic centre of an empire into the political centre, relocating the capital city of the Habsburg state from Vienna to Budapest. Another idea of Széchenyi's was closer to reality, and he did carry it out: everyone, regardless of rank, must pay the toll to cross the bridge. This simple measure was a major staging post on the road to wiping out social privileges.

Ede Heidenhaus: Photo of the Chain Bridge from the Buda Side, 1859
Historical Photo Collection of the Hungarian National Museum, Budapest

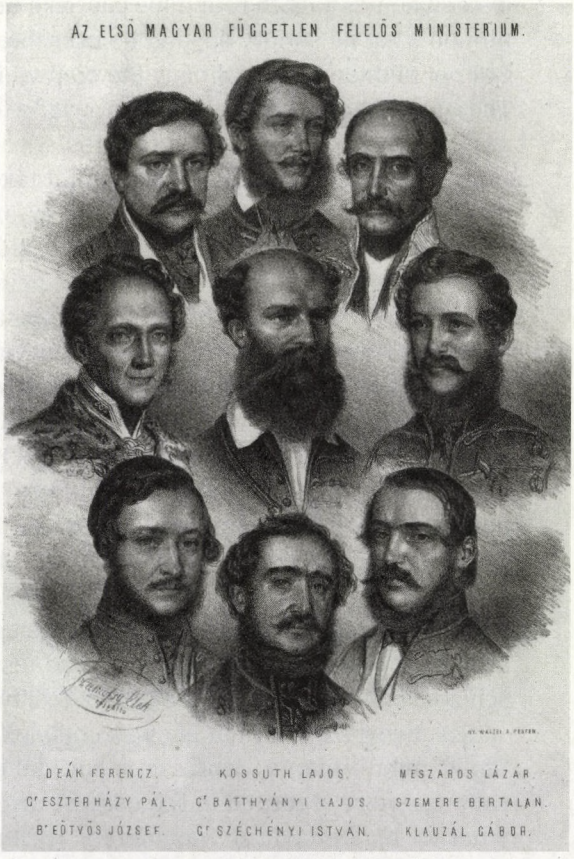
Gyula Batthyány: Széchenyi and the Chain Bridge, 1941, lithograph
Hungarian Historical Gallery of the Hungarian National Museum

Where did Széchenyi get the idea of the Chain Bridge? London's Hammersmith Bridge, the first suspension bridge over the Thames, still stands today, but it is not the structure originally designed by William Tierney Clark in 1824. Hammersmith's four "chains" of wrought-iron bars (36 bars in all) was not sufficient to support heavy traffic. Lajos Kropf, a Hungarian engineer who settled in London, wrote that Clark's assistant, Rowland Ordish, who designed London's Albert Bridge in 1873, told him of the great alarm in 1870 when 11,000–12,000 people crowded onto the bridge to watch the Oxford–Cambridge University Boat Race, which passes under the bridge just before its halfway mark. It is a shame that the reconstructed new bridge bears little relationship to its relative in Budapest, but there is a suspension bridge built further up the Thames in Marlow, Buckinghamshire, between 1829 and 1832, where the river is a few hundred feet across and the peaceful clucking of moorhen and duck families is not disturbed by traffic. Also designed by William Tierney Clark to replace a timber bridge which collapsed in 1828, this looks like a small-scale model of the Chain Bridge in Budapest (it carries a marble plaque to record the tie-up).

The toll put Hungary on the path to modern democracy. Noblemen had not paid taxes for centuries, and the notion developed that only men of equal status can develop the consciousness of a community. Even after 1849 when the Habsburgs put an end to Hungary's constitutionally separate status people

remembered this. At the time the exiled leaders of the Revolution—Lajos Kossuth above all—still enjoyed huge public support. Kossuth's name was invoked as a way of avoiding payment of the toll: in the darkest days of oppression a cobbler's apprentice sidled over to the bridge's tollbooth. "Tell me, do dogs have to pay?" "No, they don't," came the answer. "In that case I'm Kossuth's dog!" the jubilant boy exclaimed as he slipped by the collector and dashed across the bridge.

Széchenyi's world at that time involved the project to establish the Bridge Society in 1832, and spanned the years 1840–49 while preparations and construction were under way. The objects and documents presented will demonstrate to visitors that, for the genius he was, even the smallest details fitted organically into the major design he envisioned.



Elek Szamossy: The Batthyány Government, *1848, lithograph*

Hungarian Historical Gallery of the Hungarian National Museum, Budapest

The next world, the arena for the phase of his life between 1848 and 1860, was Bruno Goergen's private nursing home for mental patients at Döbling near Vienna. "The Opponent of Absolutism" might be the title given to this room. In September 1848 the physician attending Széchenyi, on finding that his mental state had clouded over to the point that he was a danger to himself, had him admitted there. He remained there until his death eleven years later (this meant that he never crossed the completed Chain Bridge). In the extensive literature on Széchenyi, little material is devoted to his illness. Indeed our first impression is that most of his biographers strongly question—even deny—that the Count was ever ill.

The general public has a much better knowledge of physics, for example, thanks to urban growth and the creation of electricity or water supply networks. The same goes for health and hygiene (Ferenc Móra tells the tale of a court

jester who ties a cloth round his jaw, as if he had toothache. Thousands advise him on what he should do, and he uses this surfeit of advice to prove to Prince Gabriel Bethlen that healing is the craft which most people are competent in!) The moral here is that medical knowledge is truly widespread but superficial and lags behind scientific progress. The viewer is overwhelmed by Peter Breughel the Elder's self-portrait, but it takes a rheumatologist to identify the illness which produces the peculiar cramp in the hand holding the brush.

Laymen feel confident these days about diagnosing mental problems thanks to the advances and popularisation of neuropsychiatry. Many of Széchenyi's biographers, in the same boat, have shown similar self-assurance. The way lay awareness intersects with genuine scientific knowledge fluctuates over time. If someone flouts the accepted norms of behaviour, the judgement about whether his incapacity to stick to these norms is tied to mental illness or not hangs on the dominant ideas in society in any one time: the idea of what is normal shifts according to age, community and culture. In everyday speech we distinguish between "nervous illness" and "insanity". But the distinction has no medical basis: it makes no sense, medically, to talk about "having a nervous breakdown" and "suffering a bout of mental disturbance". For the layman, neurosis can apply to anyone—especially depression and hysteria. Manic or melancholic behaviour are "nervous illnesses" whereas "madness" is associated with psychotic or schizoid behaviour, losing a sense of reality, hallucinations and delusions.

Széchenyi's emotional life was complex. Extreme mood swings, a peculiar "split" mind—mania, depression, suicidal impulses and unjustified self-accusations—were recorded in the earliest writings about him. Opinion is divided whether his behaviour was merely "eccentric"—what was then within the bounds of normalcy—or pathological. Few people dispute that by the end of the summer of 1848 he showed severe symptoms, and therefore it was reasonable to have him admitted to a sanatorium. But then that condition "cleared up" by the mid 1850s. By the end of the decade he showed he was capable of intellectual activity of a high order. On this the opinions of biographers are again divided. Was Széchenyi ill, or was he still ill, during this period? Was he not ill but simply using the Döbling asylum as a place where he was receiving treatment, or simply as a convenient political cover? Furthermore, at the time, much less was known than now about the length of time needed for a period of clarity after an episode of depression in the case of a bipolar disorder.

In the exhibition room on Döbling contemporary medical documents convey that Széchenyi was genuinely ill (his episodes of mania and depression, the urge to murder his family, his eccentricities of dress and behaviour and the diagnostic descriptions which chronicle them are proof enough of this), but equally no clear-cut diagnosis is given. Whatever he did or did not suffer, one thing is certain: his memory and ability to think logically were sound enough

for the occasional visitor such as Ferenc Deák (who in 1867 drafted the Compromise between Hungary the Habsburgs) in 1856 to think he was not ill. After recovering from his attacks—essentially from 1856—he was able to embark on an intellectual and political activity of a high standard. In his suite of rooms he operated what amounted to a clandestine centre to produce newspaper articles and leaflets. With the help of others, including his son Count Béla Széchenyi (1857–1918), he managed to smuggle to London, and have published and distributed there, the manuscript of a hugely successful German-language squib entitled *Ein Blick auf den anonymen Rückblick* (1859) which poked merciless fun at reactionary propaganda. He also managed to draw the attention of Lord Palmerston and Emperor Napoleon III of France to the intolerability of the situation in Hungary.[2]

Wilhelm Ramming: Austrian Troops Reach Pest on the 5th of January 1849, *lithograph*
Hungarian Historical Gallery of the Hungarian National Museum, Budapest

Challenging as it may be for a museum to exhibit a mental disorder, Széchenyi's death, by his own hand, was as big a test. The bloodied shirt, jacket and britches normally in the family crypt at Nagycenk are a startling enough spectacle. But this had to be complemented with a rigorous reconstruction of what actually happened. Even to this day the myth thrives that Széchenyi was murdered by secret agents of the court in Vienna, and a robust response to this needs to be given. Many still refuse to accept that Széchenyi was mentally ill, and not only because they are not familiar with the true nature of psychiatric disorders. Their disbelief in whatever psychiatrists assert is based on purely ideological grounds. As they associate a "disturbance of the mind" with vulgar notions of crazy behaviour, no medical opinion can shake the moral commitment and respect for "the greatest Hungarian". It could be that this moral judgment is a major article of faith in Széchenyi as a latter-day saint of the national religion. A saint cannot be "mad" and a saint must not commit suicide. This aspect of the Széchenyi cult is intriguing, but no one has investigated it yet.

2 ■ See Ervin Fenyő, "Letters Between István Széchenyi, Lady Stafford and Lord Palmerston". *The Hungarian Quarterly,* No. 163, Autumn 2001, pp. 65–86 and Géza Buzinkay's article on pp. 40–42.

At the centre of the room which conjures up the world of the Döbling sanatorium is a replica of the armchair in which Széchenyi died (photographs and written descriptions indicate this is the case). In a glass case next to this are the notes jotted down at the time by Father Antal Tolnay, the parish priest of Nagycenk, in which he describes how Széchenyi himself had explained to him the surest way of committing suicide. Meanwhile, on a monitor screen placed by the legs of the chair, a continually running DVD uses silhouettes in a realistic form of animation to dramatise, in the words of the priest as using Széchenyi's words, how such a suicide can be carried out "with due certainty". Visitors thus hear an actor speaking words set to paper 150 years ago:

> Esteemed Posterity! It is possible that in time there will be those who, just as at the time of his death, not being taken into close confidence strenuously deny the shot in the head, or in other words the suicide, and assert that it must have happened by chance or was at someone else's order. That does not stand up. He dispatched himself with his own hand. His beloved wife, the gracious Countess, his dear Children, and every individual among the count's kinsfolk were strongly convinced of that. When he was still in good health and the matter of self-destruction came up in conversation he declared that the most certain means of suicide, and the one involving least suffering, was a shot in the head. To the objection, what if a person aimed badly? he replied: the surest way is if the person concerned places his left hand on edge and cups it under his left eyebrow, with the pistol's barrel being placed under it and discharged, the upheld left hand will not permit any wobbling of the pistol. And indeed after his death the palm of the left hand resting on his left knee (he was seated on an armchair) was blackened by the smoke of the gunpowder discharge as a sign that he had acted in the aforesaid manner.

Finally, do we really know what led István Széchenyi to commit suicide? What caused him to turn the weapon on himself? And what trap lies in wait for historians? Historians tend to fill in gaps by applying common sense to the probable motivation of an act. This is hard to do when the subject is mentally unstable, especially if we are ignorant of the specific nature of the illness. We know that the authorities were threatening to search his quarters and transfer him to one of the Austrian state lunatic asylums. Maybe these things had nothing to do with his suicide; maybe his mind simply "clouded over" again. So our exhibition makes clear that we don't know exactly. It also makes clear his staggering accomplishment, showing that even as a sick man, he was valuable to society.

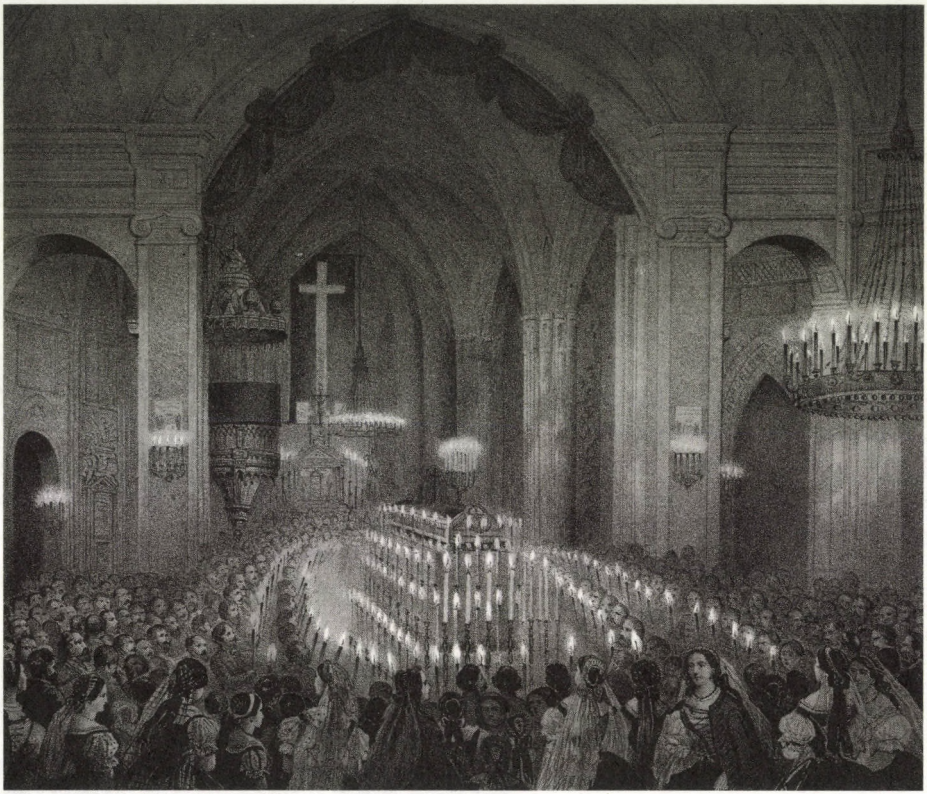
One last point is a grand platitude which, amazing as it may seem, is nonetheless true for all that: a human life does not end with death. A fresh world (even worlds) is opened up by Széchenyi's posterity, the influence his life's work has had, and continues to exert, to this day. This room might well

bear the name: "Cults of Széchenyi—Hero or Victim?" The cult which surrounded his funeral was followed by his more sedate glorification in the age of the Dual Monarchy after the Compromise. The copy of the statue of King Saint Stephen in the tiny community of Pusztacsalád near the border with Austria is presented to illustrate it. The work of a stonemason, György Höller, this was erected in 1860 ostensibly to honour the first Hungarian king, but the likeness is that of Count Széchenyi, as the face is the exact copy of the bust by the Austrian sculptor Hans Anton Gasser, who made it in the Döbling sanatorium, regarded as the only authentic portrait of the Count. An unqualified idolisation of Széchenyi took place in the inter-war period while in the divergent images of the two eras of socialism (the short-lived one of 1919 and the forty years from 1948–49) the process of political expropriation continued. In portraying this "world" it has to be made evident that each particular epoch seeks answers to its own problems and it makes use of the great man for this purpose, frequently without any scruples. Yet if the actions and thoughts of a historical figure are forged or falsified then he becomes a victim rather than

Széchenyi's bedroom in Döbling, 1860
Photograph by Ludwig Angerer
Historical Photo Collection of the Hungarian National Museum, Budapest

The armchair in which Széchenyi died, 1860
Photograph by Ludwig Angerer
Historical Photo Collection of the Hungarian National Museum, Budapest

The leather Sorgenstuhl *("Worry Chair") next to the bed, at its side, a recorder the length of a walking cane, and the "fool's cap" which Széchenyi wore to protect him against the draught on his indoor walks. Széchenyi, in Döbling, lived in a five-room apartment. Two windows opened onto the "garden of the patients," a grove of horse chestnuts, the third on to that part of the garden where patients exercised in the company of their carers.*



Unknown Artist: Requiem mass for Count István Széchenyi in the Pest Inner City Parish Church, 1860, lithograph
Hungarian Historical Gallery of the Hungarian National Museum, Budapest

honoured focus of his own cult. Politically inspired cults rarely preserve the true features of the historical figure; indeed, the abiding moral imperative of our duty towards the dead is to wash away any traces of false cults from their memory.

As I see it, people always had two images of Széchenyi. One was the Széchenyi of legend, the infallible hero who knew everything, and always knew it in advance. He therefore had to be heeded in the same way that the faithful obey a saint, and there is no question that a cult of this sort can play a very positive role in a given community. On the other hand, there is also the image of the flesh-and-blood man who wrestled with life, and, despite all the troubles and illness, produced a brilliant life's work. He may have proven fallible and mistaken on many occasions (and he castigated himself, sometimes excessively). But he was an exceptional genius, the first person to lay out a programme for Hungary's transformation into a civil society. Some people are captivated by the myth; others are more attracted by the image of the fallible man. Today both notions are part of the Hungarian past. We must never forget, however, that these two images are not the same. ❧

András Gergely

Life and Afterlife

Széchenyi fretted over the immortality of the soul throughout his life. A devout Christian, the Count worried about the boundary between salvation and damnation. How can you act decisively in a state of constant uncertainty? Choose the wrong road and risk your salvation. Széchenyi's solution was to struggle for the salvation and happiness of his fellow men: a major driving force of his exceptionally active life was hope of heavenly immortality. But Széchenyi also strove to ensure his immortality on earth.

Property was central to his plans for the afterlife. Before 1848 it had not been customary to prepare a will in Hungary: the estates of aristocrats remained in the family and reverted to the Crown if the family died out. In theory bought property could be bequeathed, but this happened rarely. The next of kin, usually the children, automatically inherited goods and chattels and it was up to them to divide them up. Széchenyi chided his fellow countrymen for their lackadaisical attitude to death, which, he maintained, was an important topic for reflection. Death could strike at any time and writing a will was vital preparation.

On his trip to the lower reaches of the Danube in 1830 he caught malaria and was so ill that, in the absence of a doctor, he thought his time had come. A will, drawn up well before his journey, was kept at his home in Pest (to this day we don't know what this particular will contained). While suffering on his Danube barge he drew up further codicils, one of them personal, the other

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András Gergely

is Professor at the Department of Modern and Contemporary History of Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest. He has published widely on 19th-century Hungarian history including two books on Széchenyi. The text published here is an edited version of the Preface to Széchenyi emlékezete. Serlegbeszédek a Nemzeti Kaszinóban 1864–1944 *(Széchenyi's Memory: The National Casino Tankard Toasts 1864–1944). László Anka ed., Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2010.*

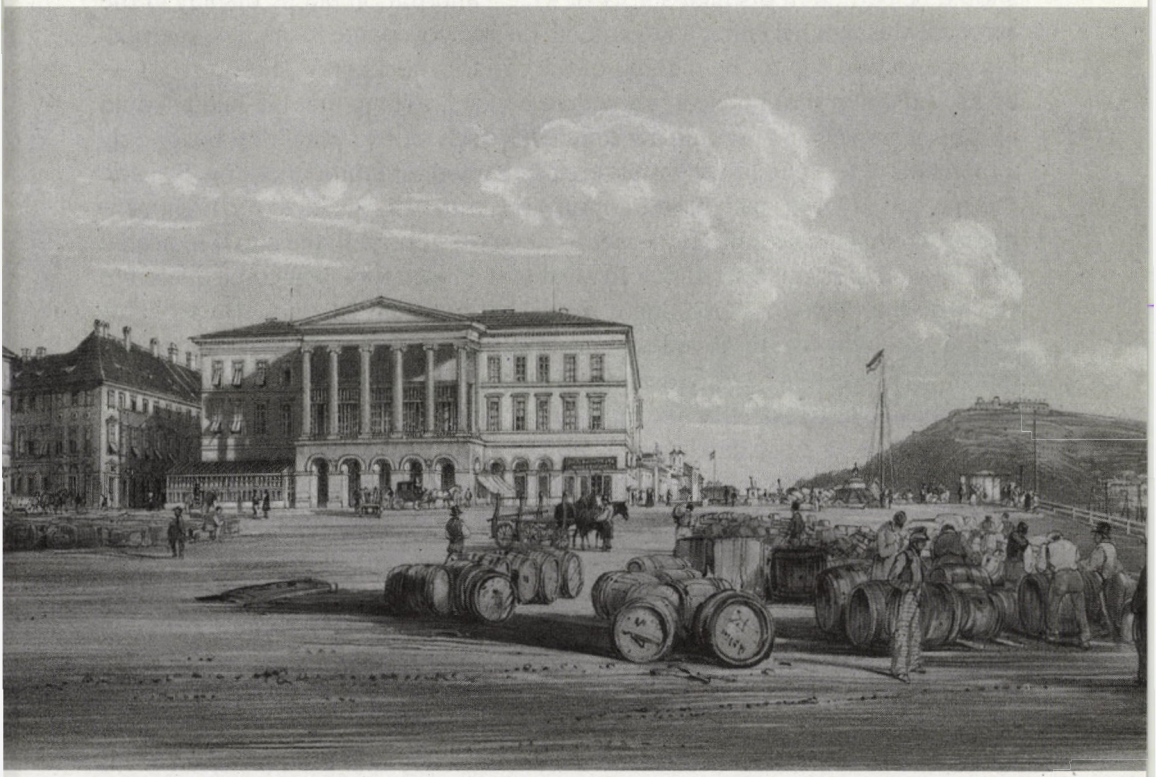
political. The private one entrusted to his travelling companion Count János Waldstein shows that Széchenyi was overcome by a terror typical of the Romantic Age. Since childhood he feared awakening to find himself buried alive and then waking in his grave. He wrote instructions to his friend: shoot him in the heart, or should he shrink from the deed, ask a surgeon to remove it. Wracked by pain, he was on the verge of suicide: "If I did not believe in the immortality of the soul, and I did not place my trust in God, I could not put up with so much tormenting pain," he dictated to Count Waldstein. He had not even reached forty.

Széchenyi's final surviving will with codicils stems from 1833, drawn up during a session of the Hungarian Diet in Pozsony (Pressburg/Bratislava). It is clear that his will was the result of careful deliberation and, even though the style is clearly Széchenyi's, it was written with the help of a lawyer. He strove for maximum publicity so that others should follow in his footsteps, and asked fellow members of the Diet to act as witnesses (they were not necessarily aware of its content). Of course he could not bequeath his vast inherited estates—his brothers were in the line of inheritance—but he laid down how his mortal remains, servants, and additional foundations should be disposed of. He wanted to offer his body to England for dissection to help fight prejudices against dissection there, though he admitted its impossibility in practice. Besides it would be considered odd in his homeland. Still, he repeated his insistence in his will: "Have my heart cut out of my chest".

His will also contained a provision for establishing a national theatre and a large indoor ball court. But it was for the establishment of a gentlemen's club, the National Casino, that Széchenyi specified the largest amount: twenty thousand silver florins. That sum with interest, alongside endowments pledged by others, was to be drawn on when the total exceeded a quarter of a million silver florins—a huge sum of money considering the initial plans were to commence building once the total had reached 200,000 florins. (The 60,000-florin endowment for the Hungarian Academy in 1825 was to be maintained by his heirs, his brothers as well, who were obliged to continue paying interest on the sum.) In short, Széchenyi envisaged an imposing palace for his Casino, the project closest to his heart.

Széchenyi created the Casino foundation during the 1827 Diet in Pozsony, taking particular care that both the deputies in the Lower House and magnates of the Upper House should be members. His aim, then, was to elevate social life, "the exchange of ideas, and specifically a social rapprochement between the aristocracy and the best of the middle nobility". After the prorogation of the Diet, the Casino was relocated to Pest, where it operated at first as the Pest Casino and then, from 1830, as the National Casino. Despite the relatively steep fee, membership grew rapidly, exceeding 500 during the 1840s, officials, advocates

and Jewish merchants among them. To begin with, the Casino leased rooms on the second floor of the building of the Lloyd Insurance Company (the Lloyd Palace) on the Pest bank of the Danube. In 1859 it moved to new rented premises, the Cziráky Palace in Szép (Beautiful) Street in the Inner City's fifth district (the street got its name from the splendid palace). In 1871 the Casino acquired ownership of the whole building. The Casino was bombed in 1945, no trace of it remained, and it could not have functioned in the decades to come anyway.



The Palace of the Pest Society of Merchants (later the Palace of the Lloyd Insurance Company), built by József Hild in 1827–28. It was one of the most beautiful Classicist buildings in Pest and stood on Kirakodó (Unloading) Square at the Pest bridgehead of the future Chain Bridge. The National Casino was on the second floor between 1830–47.

Hungarian Historical Gallery of the Hungarian National Museum, Budapest

One further provision dates to the 1833 will. One thousand pieces of gold (roughly five thousand silver florins) were set aside to pay for a cup of pure gold, to be the property of the Casino, inscribed thus: "He who lives on in the memory of his countrymen shall not perish." Every year, "at a shareholders' dinner", it was to be filled with the best wine of the Casino and drunk in his memory. This much is clear: Széchenyi dwelt on worldly immortality and

symbolic gestures of remembrance. As the Age of Reform progressed, conquests on this earth gradually came to be seen as more important than immortality in the hereafter. That cup gifted to them ensured that members of the Casino would never forget who granted their institution's very existence. In other words, Széchenyi himself contributed an important element to the foundations of his own cult.

The heart-removal provision was repeated in his will of 1838: "[The heart] should be bathed in distilled spirits of wine," and put on public display in the National Museum his father had founded. He also covenanted that, now married, his wife should see to the making of the cup for the Casino. Then in 1841 he again laid down that his heart should be excised, adding that his head should also be removed "lest I should awaken to life once more, even if that be for only a moment." The Romantic nightmare thus haunted him throughout his life, and the cup, synonymous with his immortality on earth, was linked to the nightmare of reawakening in a coffin. His perpetual preoccupation with the cup is indicated by the fact that he instructed that the text of the inscription was to be altered to "He who lives loved ...," making it somewhat more mysterious. (He probably meant: "He who is still loved by his countrymen [after his death] does not perish.") Then in 1841 Széchenyi lowered the amount of one thousand pieces of gold that was to be spent on the cup to two hundred—it was to become a silver cup instead. How much careful consideration must have gone into such a precise formulation! An 1858 codicil to the will adds that the cup was not to be filled with the finest wine in the Casino, but only the finest Hungarian wine.

Széchenyi urged the members of the Casino to draw up wills so as not to leave any loose ends in their financial affairs. He later drew special attention to the clause in his own will in which he endowed the Casino with the memorial cup. He requested that as many members as possible, setting up a list to collect signatures, undertake not only to draw up a last will and testament, but also to lay down a clause bequeathing a material memorial of some kind to the Casino. "One who does not believe that the extinction of his entire being results from the destruction of the body usually called death" is how the sheet which Casino's members were asked to sign in 1835 is headed. "Hereby, they also promised to leave a small memorial token in their last will and testament to the membership of the National Casino." That list was signed by István Széchenyi himself, followed by András Fáy, the writer and Pest County public figure, Baron Miklós Wesselényi (an old friend), Baron Béla Wenckheim, a new friend, the writer Baron Miklós Jósika, Count Antal Dessewffy, Kossuth's Conservative opponent in debate, Péter Benyovszky, defending counsel of Kossuth and others in their treason trial, Count János Waldstein, the friend and travel companion to Széchenyi on his 1830 journey to the Lower Danube, and many others. Quite a few bequeathed paintings, books or other objects to the Casino.

After Széchenyi's death it was up to his heirs, his widow and children to carry out his wishes concerning the memorial cup. In Vienna the family commissioned a silver tankard of Romantic design which bore suitable engravings recalling him and his works (current whereabouts unknown). On accepting it, the Casino's president promised, "It will be guarded as its precious treasure forever and a day," and "raised in his illustrious memory on the occasion of a banquet to be held in the week of the Casino's Annual General Meeting." So the Casino augmented the annual remembrance by holding a banquet, from which it followed that a short memorial address—more than a toast and shorter than a lecture—was to be delivered.

The first such ceremony took place in 1864 in conjunction with the Casino's general meeting. Baron Béla Wenckheim, one of Széchenyi's younger friends and political supporters, addressed it. Thereafter the event was held to coincide with the Casino's annual general meeting. Early on, the address was usually given by someone who had known Széchenyi, though younger members were included later.

It is possible to reconstruct from the addresses made during the period of almost a century one of the conservative strands of the Széchenyi cult. It is hard to imagine, however, how you were expected to drink from the tankard. Was it passed around like a communion chalice? Supposing there were one hundred participants, did that mean it would be topped up every now and then? And what wines were poured into it? A few of the speakers no doubt wrote their own address, but it is clear that a many had speechwriters. Who were these speechwriters? There are many aspects and details of the cult which can no longer be reconstructed.

This distinctive form of honouring Széchenyi prescribed by the "Greatest Hungarian" himself was not confined to the aristocracy. Admittedly, the bulk of the addresses—50 as against 29—were delivered by aristocrats, but not all. And the press made sure that what took place in a private function was known to the public.

The publication of the addresses commemorates that annual event. What can be sensed from these are the changes in thinking connected with Széchenyi, placing the focus on shifting elements of his life and work. By setting them next to each other, posterity is in a position to observe processes that someone acquainted with just a single speech or specific year is unable to see.

Addresses were delivered between 1864 and 1944—close to a century. I'll leave it to readers to form their own picture of the changes that the Széchenyi cult underwent over time, as well as to recall that Széchenyi himself arranged that people should muse on his memory and thereby grant him immortality in this world. ❧

A Letter by István Széchenyi to William Tierney Clark

Edited by Béla Mázi and Gábor Tóth[1]

The English draft of Count István Széchenyi's (1791–1860) letter to William Tierney Clark (1783–1852), who designed the first permanent bridge over the Danube between Buda and Pest, is first published here.

The document is of interest for many reasons. It sheds light on a number of subjects that captivated Széchenyi's mind in the 1840s, including his main obsession, the construction of the Chain Bridge, technical issues related to operating the Joseph Rolling Mill, finding coal and iron ore for establishing ironworks, etc. As most of his efforts aimed at starting and implementing an industrial revolution in his native country, it was natural that the Count, whose proficiency in the English language had been found worthy of noting in his military records, was fascinated by the modernization of Britain. In addition to visiting the Isles in the preceding three decades, Széchenyi frequently exchanged letters in English with engineers, investors and inventors. Recipients of his letters include English physician and author of the two-volume work *Hungary and Transylvania* John Paget (1808–1892), Scottish engineer and Fellow of the Royal Society George Rennie (1791–1866), etc. English-speaking travellers took a similarly vivid interest in 19th-century Hungary.[2]

1 ■ We wish to thank Diána Bakó and Béla Rozsondai, our colleagues in the Department of Manuscripts & Rare Books of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, for their invaluable help in transcribing this document. We are also indebted to Kinga Körmendy and András Mázi, who provided us with important additional information.

2 ■ For a selection of their accounts, see *19th-Century Hungary in the Western Eye,* ed. B. Mázi and G. Tóth in collaboration with Thomas Cooper, *Hungarian Heritage,* 9:1–2 (2008 [2009]).

Béla Mázi
is senior librarian and keeper of the Széchenyi Collection at the Department of Manuscripts & Rare Books of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.
Gábor Tóth
is rare book librarian and deputy head-of-department at the Department of Manuscripts & Rare Books of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

The drafts and final versions of these letters can be found by the dozen in Hungarian and foreign archives and manuscript collections.[3] Although their historical and literary value is obvious and has long been known, their linguistic quality has been rarely studied or even mentioned, owing mainly to the lack of a modern critical edition. As can be readily seen from the textual apparatus appended to the draft here published, Széchenyi's ability to express himself in English exceeded those of the average non-native English speaker. He carefully crafts his sentences and is at pains to rephrase them if needed to accurately communicate his thoughts. The grammatical and stylistic corrections made by his personal secretary Antal Tasner (1808–1861) are restricted to mistakes and mannerisms that easily slip into any text composed by a non-native user of a foreign language.

The text published here is based on the original manuscript preserved at the Department of Manuscripts & Rare Books of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. It spans four large folio pages (400 x 260 mm), each assigned in pencil the shelf mark K 193/176 and a Roman current number (in the upper right-hand corner) by former keeper of the Széchenyi Collection, Kinga Körmendy.[4] In addition to her hand, three hands can be distinguished. All words in ink are Széchenyi's own; grammatical and stylistic corrections in pencil are by Tasner. A third hand, belonging to literary historian and editor of Széchenyi's diaries Gyula Viszota (1871–1947) or historian Jenő Horváth (1881–1950), added in pencil the words "copied and translated" *[lemásolva és fordítva]* to the upper right-hand edge of fol. 1r, just above the shelf mark. No early 20th-century translation is known to us.[5]

The manuscript is transcribed in full and editorial intervention in the text has been kept to a bare minimum. Folio breaks are indicated in angle brackets, editorial [...] being used to designate illegible words. Tasner's corrections and Széchenyi's alterations to his own text have been merged in the present edition, as it can be safely assumed that the final version received by Clark contained a mixture of both. Széchenyi's idiosyncratic dots and dashes that intersperse his manuscripts have been omitted. No effort has been made to standardize the spelling and grammar, although the punctuation of the text was tacitly modified to provide the reader with a fairly readable text.

The textual apparatus is designed to help the reader examine the formation of the text. Words that appear underlined there refer to Széchenyi's notes in

3 ■ The printed catalogue of Széchenyi's literary bequest in the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences lists about 100 letters written in English; cf. next note.

4 ■ See her *A Széchenyi-gyűjtemény* [The Széchenyi Collection], Catalogi Collectionis Manuscriptorum Bibliothecæ Academiæ Scientiarum Hungaricæ, no. 9. Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Könyvtára, 1976.

5 ■ An incomplete and occasionally defective modern Hungarian translation is available in *Széchenyi pesti tervei* [The Pest Projects of Széchenyi], ed. Vera Bácskai and Lajos Nagy, Magyar Levelestár. Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1985, pp. 243–49 (document no. 109, trans. Iván Bába and Judit Vásárhelyi).

the left-hand margins that do not belong to the text proper; they served as aides memoires to the author about what he was to write. The editorial comments offer basic information about the places, persons and events mentioned in the course of the text; they are not intended to be exhaustive.

<fol. 1r> April 5th 1842

Tierney Clark

Dear Clark,

The abominable Magasins, thanks God, are rapidly vanishing. We enjoy their demolition very heartily from our windows—A. Clark gets quite fat of pleasure. Teasedale, etc., etc., are in very high spirits and I feel as if I had 10 years lay on my back! I come just this moment from the Old Archid. He lost his favorite Daughter, Princess Hermina, only a few weeks ago; she was a highly accomplished Lady, and his great favorite, yet the old high mettled gentleman, after a fortnight of, I dare say, very keen pain, is all life and spirit again. I asked him about the time he would think fittest for laying the foundation stone of our Bridge; he thinks that the 20th of August, which is king Stephen's, the hungarian St. Patrick's, day would be the most adequate. He wished me to present you his best compliments and, if you find the day proposed fit for the purpose, he will make his steps in order that our Souvereins, or at least the Archiduke Louis, should come down in the Souvereins's name to perform this noble act. You know best that we want regular six meetings and a couple of dozen letters to bang <fol. 1v> now and then a sparrow;

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4 *Magasins:* the storehouses at *Kirakodó tér* ("Unloading Square"), today's Roosevelt Square at the Pest bridgehead of the Chain Bridge. Vessels transporting goods on the Danube were unloaded here.

5 *windows:* in the now demolished Ullmann House where Széchenyi rented an apartment in 1836; *Clark:* Scotsman Adam Clark (1811–1866), local construction supervisor of the Chain Bridge, designer of the Castle Hill Tunnel at the Buda bridgehead. Not related to the English engineer W. T. Clark.

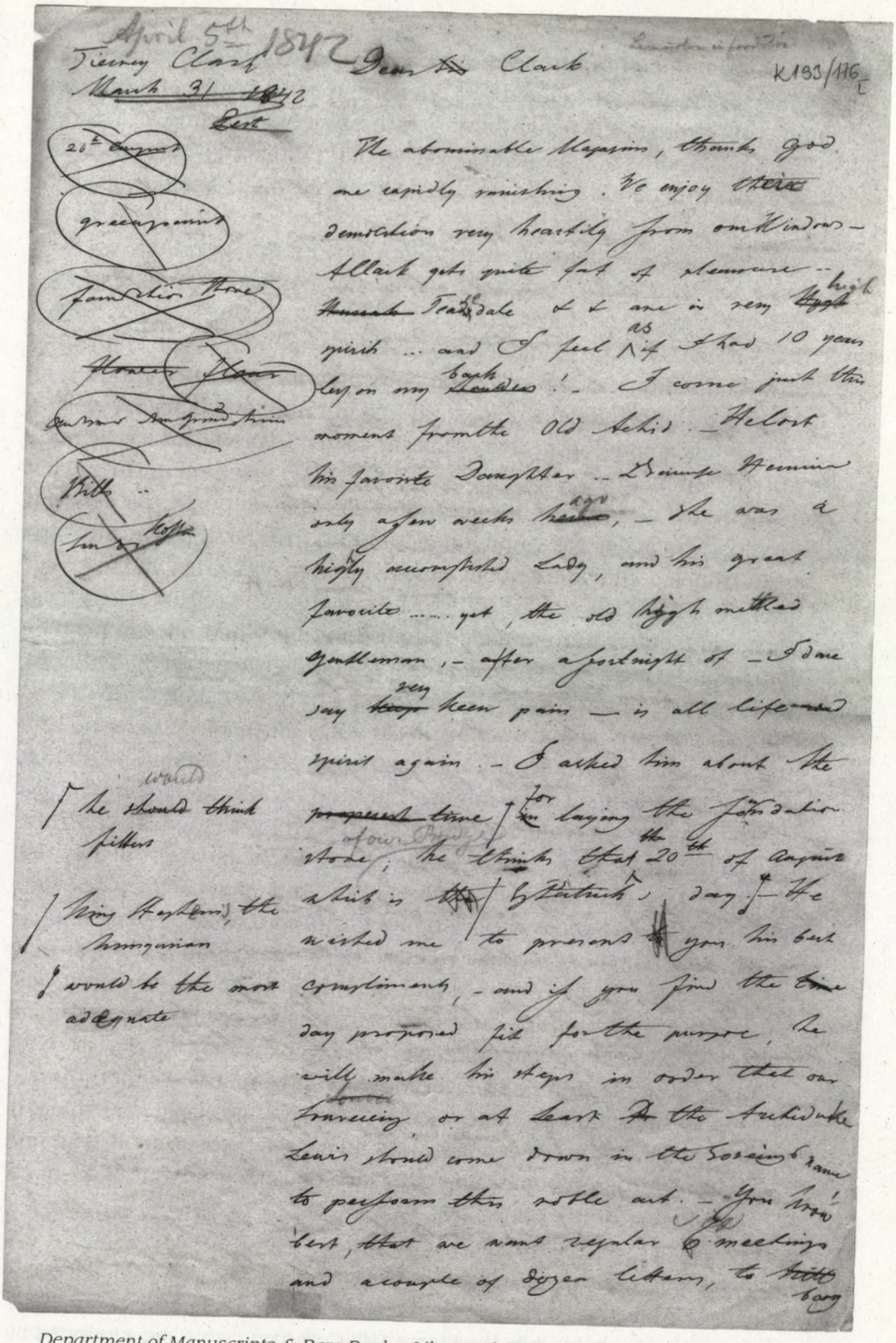
6 *Teasedale:* James Teasdale, Adam Clark's assistant at the Chain Bridge.

8 *Archid.:* Archduke Joseph of Austria (1776–1847), Palatine of Hungary; *Hermina:* Archduchess Hermine Amalie Marie of Austria (1817–February 13, 1842).

16 *Souvereins:* Emperor Ferdinand I of Austria (1793–1875), King of Hungary until December 2, 1848, and his wife, Maria Anna of Savoy (1803–1884).

17 *Louis:* Archduke Louis (1784–1864), youngest son of Emperor Leopold II, only surviving brother of Emperor Francis I.

19 *bang:* either onomatopoeia for shoot or a slip of the pen for bag; a reference to the phrase: "using cannons to shoot sparrows".



April 5th 1842
Dear Clark
K193/116/1

The abominable Magarin, thanks god are rapidly vanishing. We enjoy the demolition very heartily from our windows — Allark gets quite fat of pleasure — Fraydale & I are in very high spirits ... and I feel as if I had 10 years less on my head! — I come just this moments from the Old Archd. — Helcot his favorite Daughter — Dreimpf Hemine only a few weeks ago, — She was a highly accomplished Lady, and his great favorite ..... yet, the old high mettled Gentleman, — after a fortnight of — I dare say very keen pain — is all life and spirit again. — I asked him about the proposed time for laying the foundation stone; he thinks that the 20th of August which is St Stephens day — He wished me to present you his best compliments, — and if you find the day proposed fit for the purpose, he will make his steps in order that our meeting, or at least the Archduke Louis should come down in the Sovereign to perform the noble act. — You may best, that we want regular Committee meetings and a couple of Diner Letters, to

he should think pillars

Count Stephen Szechenyi the Hungarian

would be the most adequate

Department of Manuscripts & Rare Books, Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, K 193/176, fol. 1r

let us give, therefore, the requisite time to transact this most important bussiness (!) and write me a few lines whether the day mentioned will suit you; postpone it if you think it necessary; but don't do it, I pray, if not warranted, as being myself a Stephen I am rather partial for that day.

Now, as to the foundation stone itself, allow me to tell you the particular view I have got on this subject. To what purpose do we perform the ceremony of laying a foundation stone? It is, I think, to include at once some coins, etc., etc., for an age to come, when only our works should—as every thing in the universe (!) will—fall to decay. But now, if we place this sort of "souvenirs" in the middle of the pillar, there is no chance, as I think, that the devil himself could come in possession of it for ever, as the whole thing will get a quite solid mass of rock and in the most extraordinary and unexpected case of its falling to pieces the old Danube will take immediate possession of it. It would be equal to throw any thing in the sea. I think we should improve and, 1°, decide what all should come under the foundation stone and then, 2°, to place it in such a way, that it could be taken out again, although with great difficulty. Let the future progenitor <fol. 2r> have a chance to see that there have been some pretty high minded fellows amongst their ancestors; they may have the pleasure, in case Hungary should proceed on the path of a noble developement, to see the starting point of its material growth, or blush, if all were to go south again. Revolve all this in your mind and make me some allowance for not being quite able of expressing all that I feel on this subject tolerably, as I perhaps could do it in my native tongue. The question what all should be placed in the foundation would lead to the most interesting or, better to say, to the most useful debates. All the old oligarchs and priests of prejudice, who opposed the work with all their craft but seem now to be very willing to accept a handsome share in our success—or at least would be very glad if their stupid resistance would be forgot—shall be placed in the most ridiculous jeopardy and be perhaps less obstinate in case we should start again something above their conception and capacity.

As to the flour of our mill, I am very sorry to say that we cannot think yet of sending the smallest quantity to a greater distance from here than 10 english <fol. 2v> miles and not at all by its being easily spoilt and not fit for transportation but for the only reason because we cannot produce

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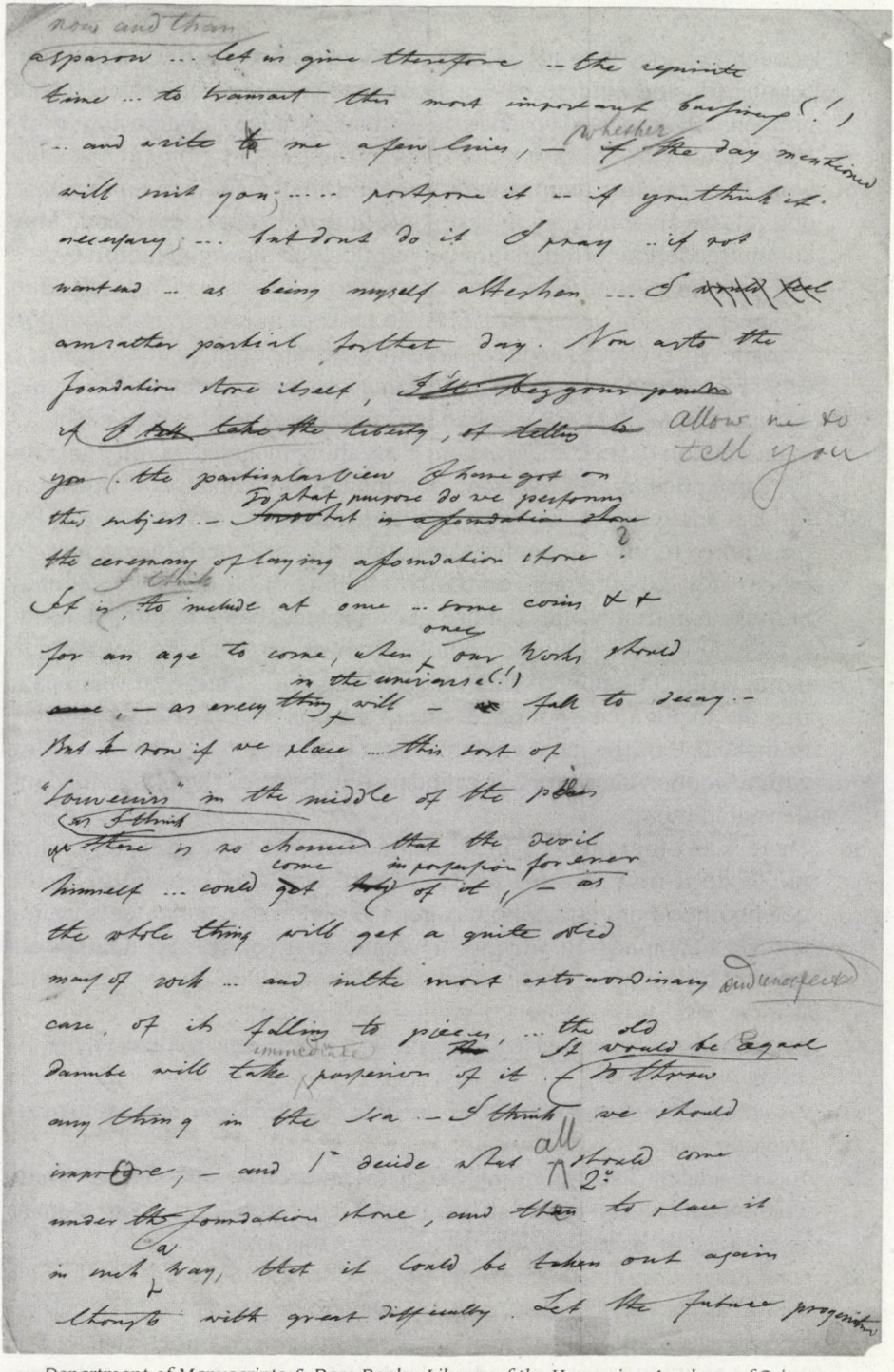
37 *progenitor:* Széchenyi evidently meant progeny.

52 *mill:* named after Archduke Joseph, the Joseph Rolling Mill [Hungarian *József Hengermalom*] was built by the Steam Mill Company, which was founded by Széchenyi in 1839. It went into operation on September 15, 1841.



Department of Manuscripts & Rare Books, Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, K 193/176, fol. 1v

enough and they litterally will not suffer us to take it farther. I take it in serious consideration to have a second steam engine and three sets of grinding rolles so as to produce three times as much as we do now; now, I say, as we work only with two sets in the present moment but shall work in a couple a months with three. If the demand will not slacken, and this we shall find out in very short time, I do not doubt, though my committee fellow brothers are very undecided slow coach horses, we will come in the course of next summer to a decision as to the second steam engine, etc., etc., and if she can be kept in uninterrupted motion with the No 1, which keeps continually moving, it will be undoubtedly a very profitable job too. Hurrah, Hurrah! Now, as according to the tender estimates of M^essrs^ M & R you had the kindness to send me we might get in possession of their engines with every thing included—pretty near for the same price as M^essrs^ Fletscher & Punchon at Vienna would find them for us. I am in hopes they will listen this time to my advice and give the preference to english engines, and this they will perhaps do now so much <fol. 3r> the more as our two boilers of Mr E & C° are already both gone and only after the use of rather less than 6 months. Luckily, I did not permit to pay their whole account, so, we have got them in hand, where I shall keep them most kindly for a time, and very bussy they are to put a new bottom in one of the boilers, etc., etc. We shall try to make use of the most valuable hints you gave me as to the coating with a wooden case and our cylinders and boilers. There is hardly any deposit in them.

There is an other thing I wanted to communicate to you long ago. Allow me to do it now in a few words. There is a land proprietor in the neighborhood of Pesth, who has got a very rich coal mine. He is willing to form a company. He will give the mine, an other, perhaps to a certain amount my humble person, shall come forward with the capital, a third

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67 *M & R:* Miller is mentioned in a previous letter of Széchenyi to Clark (March 19, 1842).

69 *Fletscher & Punchon:* the Viennese firm that supplied steam engines to *József Hengermalom*.

72 *E & C°:* unidentifiable company; Széchenyi is certainly not referring here to Count Hugo Philipp Karl of Eltz (1817–1848), Lord of Vukovar in East Slavonia on the Danube, as suggested by the Hungarian translation.

81 *land proprietor:* noted sportsman Count Móric Sándor (1805–1878), also known as the "devil's horseman". According to the March 29, 1842, entry in Széchenyi's diary, the two men discussed the prospect of establishing an ironworks *(Eisenhütte)* on Sándor's landed property at Bajna, a small village about 28 miles to the northwest of Buda.

offer his knowledge, a fourth his time, etc., etc., etc., and we should divide the profits. The coal is of the same quality you took with you, capital for making gas. The quantity seems to be inexhaustible. The question is, in my opinion, how to create a great demand, as the profits could not be of any consequence, <fol. 3v> if the demand was not great. Well, but the consumption of fuel is, in general, very limited in this country, the supply extremely easy; as we have got yet forests of the [...] extension, the only way of creating a greater demand is then to introduce the applications of gaslight and of establishing ironworks. But, as to the gas, competition would be very great, as they find coals every where, and hence the price of it would soon be brought to a very low level, whereas the competition would be almost none in establishing ironworks, where—as a greater capital is wanted—we should be left for a long time in the monopoly of the job if we take—which, of course, is the main point—a proper start. The question is whether the coals I mention, which will not be converted in coaks, as you know, can be used for ironworks, whether there is iron ore, etc., to be found in proper places, and to be got at easily and, at last, how it stands with the means of bringing the produce to market tolerably cheap. Well, I do not know all this but so much I know that it would be well worth a trial and to take all this in a nearer consideration in order to ascertain with some accuracy what ought to be done. I think there is no doubt that we shall find iron ore and, as to the locality, on the <fol. 4r> banks of the Danube; in a rising country I really doubt there could be any thing more advantageous than good iron works. Revolve this also in your mind. Why, I believe, it would not be altogether an ugly feeling to get hold of the treasure, which most probably lies in the mountains of Buda and Visegrad, where we admired the scenery so much times. We must inspect the place, etc., etc., together and, if you think there is any chance of employing our time and our means with success, we must continue to establish a company and to find the adequate person, etc., etc., in order to come to a conclusion and some results.

And now God bless you my dear, my most esteemed friend. But before I conclude this I must ask you two favours yet. You know I established last year a rowing club in this place. It would not take and I think only because we had got no good place for our boats. I brought the subject again on the carpet and we are in the present moment building, under Adam Clark's direction (I hope you will not have any objection against

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100 *coaks*: coke.

119 *rowing club:* the first meeting of the club, founded by Széchenyi in 1840, was held on April 8, 1841.

this), a capital boathouse just in the front of the Casino, close to our Bridge-yard wharf. There is no doubt they will find <fol. 4v> pleasure in it, but we must have every thing done properly. We want good paint. Now, if you were so kind as to send us out 2 hundred weight of patent green, under the direction of the Baron but addressed to A. Clark at Pesth, you would oblige us all very much indeed.

The second favour I ask is to get for me again one or two Bills. You had the kindness to send me the London & Birmingham Railway Bill. I should be most thankful if you could send me the Catholic Emancipation and the last Bill of Sir Robert Peel, respectively. I should make very good use of them. By the by, I almost forget to tell you that my Daughter, Caroline, marries a Mr Festetich, who was several times in England with C. A. Erdődy. He is an accomplished gentleman of one of our first families, very good figure and a very handsome fortune. Has got a very good house here and a very comfortable country seat in the neighbourhood of the land proprietor. It is not declared yet but shall be in a few days. I should wish their marriage day to be fixed [...] about the 20 August in order that with the foundation stone of the bridge the foundation stone of my getting grand papa might be laid at once, etc.

My Countess & Caroline, Marie, Bela, all wish to be kindly remembered to you and hope you will be with us long time before the 20 of August.

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123 *boathouse:* a wooden edifice built on the left of the Pest bridgehead of the future Chain Bridge; *Casino:* the National Club, a forum for political dialogue for the patriotic nobility. It was founded by Széchenyi in 1827.

127 *Baron:* Vienna-based Greek banker Baron Georgios Sinas (1783–1856), principal financier of the construction of the Chain Bridge.

130 *London & Birmingham Railway Bill:* see *Acts Relating to The London and Birmingham Railway* (London: G. Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1837).

131 *Catholic Emancipation:* the Roman Catholic Relief Act that granted almost full civil rights to Catholics in the United Kingdom in 1829.

132 *Peel:* conservative statesman Sir Robert Peel (1788–1850), prime minister of the U.K. (1841–46). It is unclear which bill of his Széchenyi is referring to here.

133 *Caroline:* Széchenyi's stepdaughter, Countess Caroline Zichy (1820–1906).

134 *Festetich:* Count Dénes Festetits (1813–1891). The couple were married on August 8, 1842; *Erdődy:* Count Sándor Lajos Erdődy (1802–1881), referred to as "A." or "Alex. Erdődy" in Széchenyi's diary (Sándor is Hungarian for Alexander). The Hungarian translation erroneously construes "A." to mean "Antal".

137–8 *land proprietor:* see comment to 81, above.

142 *Countess*: Széchenyi's wife, née Countess Crescence (Louise) Seilern-Aspang (1799–1875); *Marie:* Széchenyi's stepdaughter, née Countess Mária Zichy (1822–1881); *Bela:* Széchenyi's son, Count Béla Széchenyi (1837–1908).

Textual apparatus

Abbreviations and sigla

[...]	illegible word	*corr.*	corrected by	*in marg.*	in the margin
<>	folio numbers	*del.*	deleted by	SZ	Széchenyi
add.	added by	E	editors	T	Tasner

1 April 5th 1842] *add.* T
2 March 31 1842 Pest] *del.* T
3 Dear Clark : Dear Sir] *corr.* SZ
5 20th august] *in marg.*. SZ; their : there] *corr.* T
6 green paint] *in marg.* SZ; Hurrah Teasedale] Hurrah *del.* SZ; Teasedale : Teadsdale] *corr.* T; etc., etc. : & &] *corr.* E; high : hygh] *corr.* T; as] *add.* T
7 foundation stone] *in marg.* SZ; flour] *in marg.* SZ; flour : flower] *corr. in marg.* SZ; back : shoulders] *corr.* SZ
8 Bills] *in marg.* SZ
9 ago : hence] *corr.* T; highly : higly] *corr.* T
10 high : hygh] *corr.* T; mettled : metled] *corr.* T; very : keep] *corr.* SZ
11 properest time] properest *del.* SZ; he would : he should] *corr.* T
11–2 he would think fittest] *add. in marg.* SZ
12 for : in] *corr.* SZ; foundation : fondation] *corr.* SZ; of our Bridge] *add.* T
13 which is : which is the] *corr.* T; king Stephen's, the hungarian] *add. in marg.* SZ; Stephen's : Stephan] *corr.* T
14 would be the most adequate] *add. in marg.* SZ; adequate : adaequate] *corr.* T; present you : present to you] *corr.* T
15 day : time] *corr.* SZ
16–7 least Ar the : least the] *corr.* SZ
17 Archiduke : Archiduc] *corr.* T; Souvereins's : Soreins's] *corr.* E
18 six : 6] *corr.* T
19 bang : kill] *corr.* SZ; now and than] *add.* T; then : than] *corr.* E; sparrow : sparow] *corr.* E
21 write me : write to me] *corr.* T; whether : if] *corr.* T
22 you; postpone : you postpone] *corr.* T; necessary; but : necessary but] *corr.* T; don't : dont] *corr.* E
23 warranted : wantend] *corr.* E; I am rather : I would feel am rather] *corr.* T
24 allow me to tell you] *add.* T; itself, I'll beg your pardon if I take the liberty, of telling to you the particular] I'll beg your pardon if I take the liberty, of telling to you *del.* T; if I take : if I tell take] tell *del.* SZ
25 To what purpose do we perform : For what is a foundation stone] *corr.* SZ
26 ?] *add.* T; I think] *add.* T
27 etc., etc. : & &] *corr.* E; only] *add.* SZ; should come] come *del.* SZ
28 every thing in the universe (!) will] in the universe (!)] *add.* SZ; but h now] h *del.* SZ
29 pillar : pilon] *corr.* T; there is : as there is] *corr.* SZ

29–30 as I think] *add.* SZ
30 come : get hold] *corr.* SZ; in possession] *add.* SZ; for ever] *add.* SZ
32 and unexpected] *add.* T
33 immediate] *add.* T; It would be equal] *add.* SZ; aequal : equal] *corr.* T
34 improve : improove] *corr.* T; all] *add.* T
35 then : than] *corr.* T
35–6 such a way : such way] *corr.* SZ
38 been high minded] high *del.* SZ; some pretty high] *add.* SZ; pretty good high] good *del.* SZ
38–9 may rejoice in] rejoice *del.* SZ; they have the pleasure in] have the pleasure *add.* SZ
39 on : in] *corr.* T
40 developement : developpement] *corr.* T; to see the starting point of its material growth] *add. in marg.* SZ; growth : groth] *corr.* T
41 all were to : all that had been] *corr.* T; go : going] *corr.* T; Revolve : Rewolve] *corr.* T
42 mühl] *in marg.* SZ; m all that] m *del.* SZ
43 feel : felt] *corr.* SZ; tolerably : intolerably] *corr.* E; native : own] *corr.* T
45 useful : usefull] *corr.* T
46–7 opposed the work with all their craft but] *add. in marg.* SZ; craft : kraft] *corr.* T
47 accept a handsome] *add.* SZ; accept : take] *corr.* T; handsome : handsum] *corr.* T
48 glad : happy] *corr.* SZ; stupid] stupide T
49 ridiculous : ridicolous] *corr.* T
50 jeopardy : yeopardy] *corr.* T; obstinate : stubborn] *corr.* T; should] *add.* T; again] *add.* SZ
51 their : the] *corr.* T; conception and] *add.* SZ
53 of sending] *add.* SZ; than : as] *corr.* T
54 by : of] *corr.* T
55 because] *add.* T; take] send T
57 three new Walzsysteme] new Walzsysteme *del.* T; sets : apparatuses] *corr.* T
57–8 sets of grinding rolles] *add.* T
58 Cilinder gangs] *in marg.* SZ; grinding rolles : grinding apparatuses] *corr.* T; apparatuses : Systems] *corr.* SZ; three : 3] *corr.* SZ
59 in the present moment] *add.* SZ
60 months : month] *corr.* T; three. ?] ? *add. in marg.* T
61 this we shall find out in very short time] *add.* SZ; shall : will] *corr.* T; will be very soon discovered] *del.* SZ; do not : donot] *corr.* E; doubt : do] *corr.* SZ
62 comitee : comittee] *corr.* T; committee] *corr.* E
63 in the course of next summer] *add.* SZ; course of next : course of the next] *corr.* T
64 etc., etc. : & &] *corr.* E; uninterrupted] *add.* SZ
65 with : for] *corr.* SZ; moving : moowing] *corr.* E; be aft undoubtedly] aft *del.* SZ
66 Hurrah, Hurrah!] *add.* SZ; as after : as to] *corr.* SZ; according to : after] *corr.* T; tender] *add.* SZ
67 of M^{essrs}] *add.* SZ; me are so reasonable we] are so reasonable *del.* SZ; might : could] *corr.* T

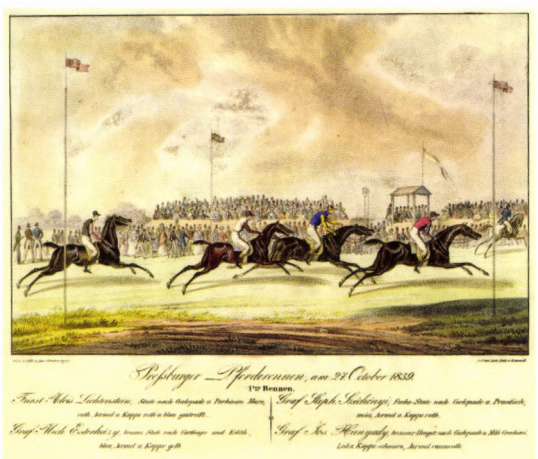
68 with every thing included] *add.* SZ
69 Fletscher : Fletcher] *corr.* E; Fletcher : F.] *corr.* T; Punchon : P.] *corr.* T; at Vienna] *add.* T; would : will] *corr.* T
70 in hopes : allmost certain] *corr.* SZ
71 perhaps] *add.* SZ; now] *add.* SZ
73 months : month] *corr.* T
76 one of the boilers : one of them] *corr.* T; etc., etc. : & &] *corr.* E
76–9 We shall try ... deposit in them] *add. in marg.* SZ
79 them : our boilers] *corr.* T
81 land amstetter] *in marg.* SZ; now] *add.* T; land] *add.* T
81–2 in the neighborhood] *add. in marg.* SZ
82 C. marries] *in marg.* SZ; who has got : who is got] *corr.* T
83–4 to a certain amount my : in one part [...]] *corr.* SZ
84 shall come forward with] *add.* SZ
85 offer] *add.* SZ; with offer] with *del.* SZ; fourth : forth] *corr.* E; etc., etc., etc. : & & &] *corr.* E; should : would] *corr.* T
86 of] *add.* SZ; quality] *add.* SZ
87 gas : gaz] *corr.* T
89 if : except] *corr.* T; if : without] *corr.* T; was : is] *corr.* SZ; being not great] being *del.* SZ
90 consumption : consumtion] *corr.* E; fuel : coal] *corr.* SZ
90–1 in this country] *add.* SZ
91 extremely : very] *corr.* SZ; forests : forest] *corr.* E
92 greater] *add.* SZ; then : than] *corr.* T
93 ind introduce] ind *del.* SZ
94 gas : gaz] *corr.* T; would soon be] *add.* SZ
96 whereas : where as] *corr.* E
97 should : would] *corr.* T
98–9 which, of course, is the main point] *add.* SZ; is the : is a] *corr.* SZ
99 main : mean] *corr.* SZ
100 as you know] *add.* SZ
101 etc. : &] *corr.* E
102 and to : where they may] *corr.* SZ; at last] *add.* SZ; the locality conveyance] locality conveyance *del.* SZ
102–3 means of bringing : means to bring] *corr.* SZ
103 tolerably cheap] *add.* SZ; know : no] *corr.* SZ
104 a trial and] *add.* SZ; trial : tryal] *corr.* T
105 in order to : and] *corr.* SZ; ascertain the how] the how *del.* SZ
106 as I think] as *del.* SZ; shall : will] *corr.* T
107 ore too and] too *del.* T
108 really doubt : dont think] *corr.* SZ; really : realy] *corr.* E
109 advantageous : avantageous] *corr.* E; than good iron works] *add. in marg.* SZ; than : as] *corr.* T; this also in : all this in] *corr.* T
110 believe : dont think] *corr.* SZ; not] *add.* SZ

111 most probably] *add.* SZ; lies and in] and *del.* SZ
112 admired togeather] togeather *del.* SZ; scenery so much times : so much so many times] *corr.* SZ
113 place : thing] *corr.* SZ; etc., etc. : & &] *corr.* E; there : their] *corr.* SZ
114 of employing our time and our means with] *add.* SZ; we must continue] *add.* SZ
114–5 to establish a company and] *add. in marg.* SZ
115 adequate : proper] *corr.* SZ; etc., etc. : & &] *corr.* E
115–6 etc., in order to advance our purposes to put the in order] in order to advance our purposes to put the *del.* SZ
116 to a conclusion and some results : to some results or to a conclusion] *corr.* SZ
118 I conclude : I shall conclude] *corr.* T; two favours yet : yet two favours] *corr.* SZ; I established : we established] *corr.* SZ
119 last year] *add. in marg.* SZ; and I think only] *add.* SZ
120 because : as] *corr.* T; got] *add.* T; for : to] *corr.* SZ
121 in the present : just] *corr.* SZ; moment] *add.* T
122 objection : thing] *corr.* T
123 just : just] *corr.* SZ; in the front of the : before the] *corr.* T; close to : angelehnt] *corr.* T; to our : on the] *corr.* T; to : to to] *corr.* E
124 Bridge-yard] *add. in marg.* T; find : ha] *corr.* SZ
125 it : the j] *corr.* SZ
126 were : where] *corr.* T; hundred : cent] *corr.* T; hundred weight] *add.* T
127 direction : name] *corr.* T
128 us : m] *corr.* SZ
129 to get for me] *add.* SZ
130 London & Birmingham : Lond. & B.] *corr.* T
131 thankful : thankfull] *corr.* E
131–2 Catholic Emancipation and the last Bill of Sir Robert Peel, respectively : the … or … or both] *corr.* T
132 I should make very good use of them.] *add.* T
133 By the by : By the bye] *corr.* T; almost : allmost] *corr.* T; my Daughter : our] *corr.* T; marries : maries] *corr.* T
135 families : familys] *corr.* T
136 figure : figur] *corr.* T; a very handsome] *add.* SZ
136–8 Has got … land proprietor.] *add in marg.* SZ
137 in the neighbourhood : very near from here &] *corr.* T
138 proprietor : proprietar] *corr.* E; should : would] *corr.* T
139 about : abouts] *corr.* E; with] *add.* SZ
140 of : if] *corr.* SZ; bridge the : bridge should be t the] *corr.* SZ; getting : geting] *corr.* T
141 might : should] *corr.* T; etc. : &] *corr.* E
142 wish : will] *corr.* SZ; kindly] *add.* T
143 long : a long] *corr.* T

Franz Eybl: *Count István Széchenyi,* 1842, lithograph
Hungarian Historical Gallery of the Hungarian National Museum, Budapest

Johann Nepomuk Ender:
Count István Széchenyi, 1818,
watercolour
Art Collection of the
Hungarian Academy of Sciences

Unknown Artist:
The First Horse Race in Pest,
1827, watercolour
Hungarian Historical Gallery
of the Hungarian National Museum,
Budapest

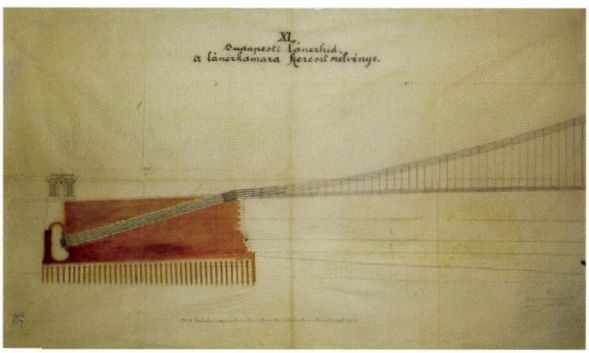


Anton Strohmayer:
Horse Race in Pozsony
(Pressburg/Bratislava), 1839,
lithograph
Hungarian Historical Gallery
of the Hungarian National Museum,
Budapest

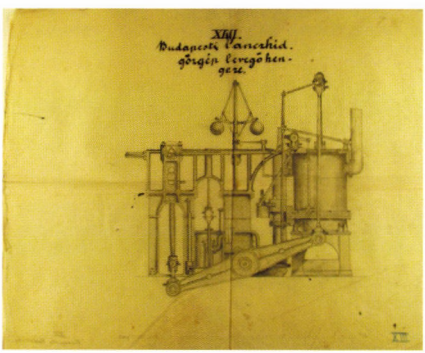
Unknown Artist: *Crescence Seilern, István Széchenyi's Wife,* after 1830, ivory miniature
Hungarian Historical Gallery of the Hungarian National Museum, Budapest

Károly Sterio after Manó Andrássy: *Count István Széchenyi on Horseback at the Pest Bridgehead of the Chain Bridge,* 1850s, watercolour
Art Collection of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences

Miklós Barabás: *Portrait of Adam Clark, in the Background the Construction of the Chain Bridge,* 1849, lithograph
Hungarian Historical Gallery of the Hungarian National Museum, Budapest



Section of the Chain-chamber, 1897
Joseph Sauter's copy of an earlier design in the possession of Franz Kölgen, onion paper, indian ink
Hungarian Technology and Traffic Museum, Budapest

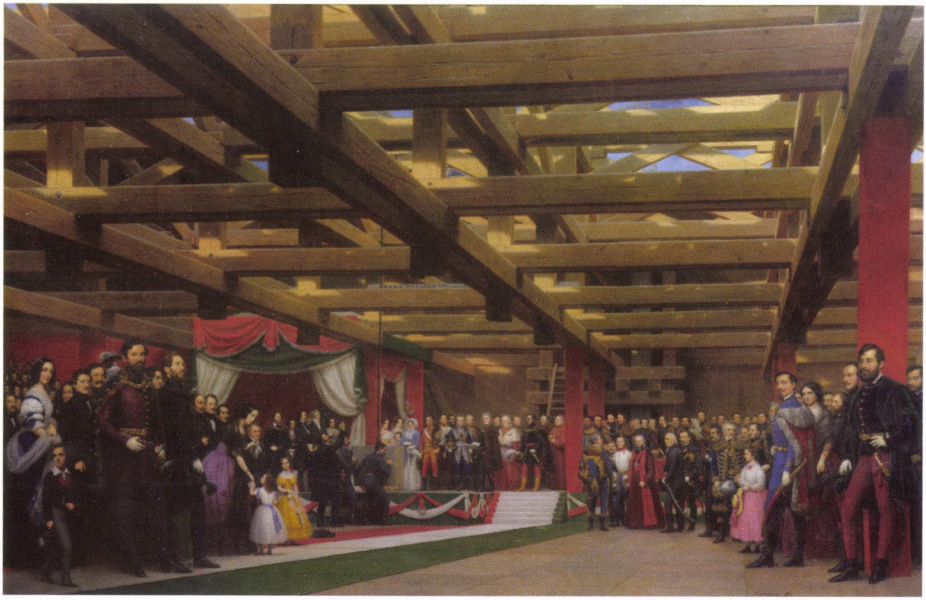


Vacuum cylinder of the Steam-engine used in the Construction at the Chain Bridge, 1897
Joseph Sauter's copy of an earlier design in the possession of Franz Kölgen, onion paper, indian ink
Hungarian Technology and Traffic Museum, Budapest

Miklós Barabás: *William Tierney Clark,* 1842, oil on canvas
Hungarian Historical Gallery of the Hungarian National Museum, Budapest

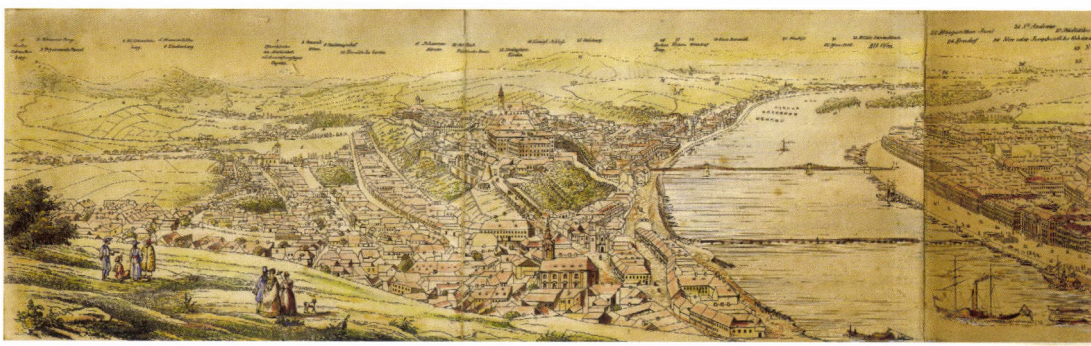
John Mortimer–John Samuel Hunt, London: *Trowel Used at the Laying of the Foundation Stone of the Chain Bridge,* 1842. Engraved by Károly Dietze, silver, enamel, ivory
Hungarian National Museum, Budapest

Gyula Szabó: *Portrait of István Széchenyi, with a View of Pest and Buda and the Planned Chain Bridge in the Background,* 1843, oil on canvas
Hungarian Historical Gallery of the Hungarian National Museum, Budapest



Miklós Barabás: *The Laying of the Foundation Stone of the Chain Bridge,* 1864, oil on canvas
Hungarian Historical Gallery of the Hungarian National Museum, Budapest

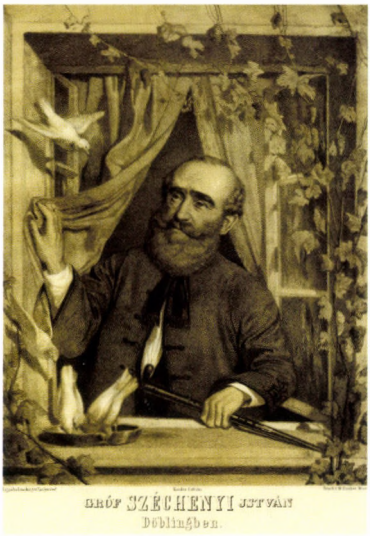
Unknown Artist: *View of Pest and Buda from Gellért Hill,* 1820s, paper, coloured lithograph
Hungarian Historical Gallery of the Hungarian National Museum, Budapest



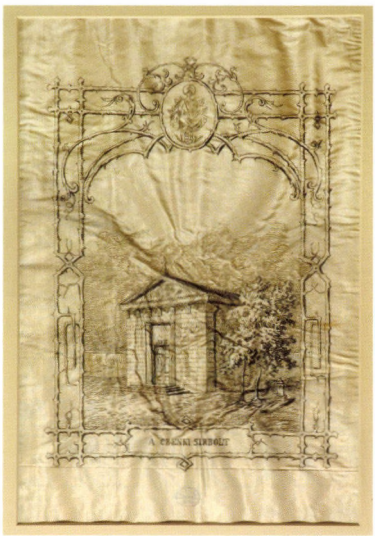
Miklós Barabás:
Portrait of Count István Széchenyi, with the Construction of the Chain Bridge in the background,
1867, oil on canvas
Hungarian Historical Gallery of the Hungarian National Museum, Budapest

Drawing of the Foundation Stone of the Chain Bridge. From above and from the side
Department of Manuscripts & Rare Books, Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, K 176/67, fol. 1r

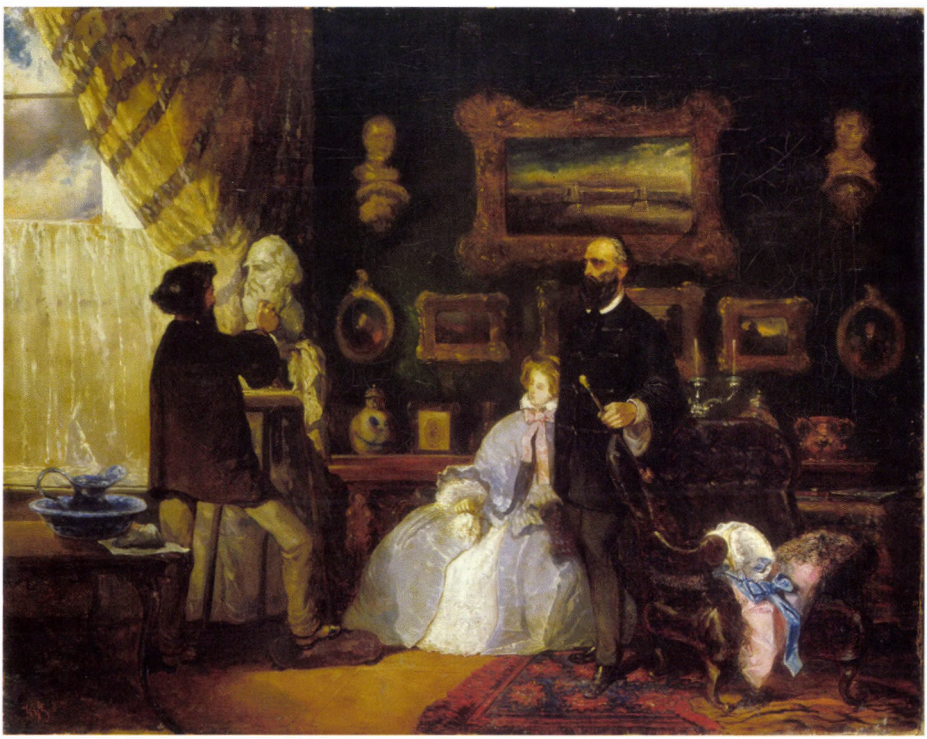
Unknown Artist: *Bird's Eye View of Pest and Buda Including the Future Chain Bridge,* around 1830, paper, coloured lithograph
Hungarian Historical Gallery of the Hungarian National Museum, Budapest



Zsigmond Löschinger: *Széchenyi Feeding Pigeons at a Window of His Room in Döbling,* 1860, lithograph
Hungarian Historical Gallery of the Hungarian National Museum, Budapest



Mrs János Damjanich, née Emilia Csernovics: *The Széchenyi Family Vault in Nagycenk,* needlework, silk.
Art Collection of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences



József Kiss: *Széchenyi Sits for Hans Gasser in Döbling,* 1860, oil on canvas
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

Nóra Veszprémi

The Greatest Hungarian Face to Face

In Remembrance of Széchenyi. Commemorative Exhibition to Mark the 150th Anniversary of the Death of the Founder of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Budapest, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 3 May 2010–15 October 2010. • Széchenyi and His Worlds. Hungarian National Museum, Budapest, 9 October 2010–6 March 2011

Hungary's Age of Reform, the busy period of modernisation in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, was spearheaded by Count István Széchenyi. This enlightened aristocrat was a key figure in establishing the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, building the Chain Bridge over the Danube, constructing flood defences on the River Tisza, and creating a venue for aristocrats, noblemen and gentlemen, the National Casino, to discuss urgent matters of the day—to mention just a few of his grander achievements. Little wonder, then, that, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Hungarian National Museum, two key institutions, have organised commemorative exhibitions to mark the 150th anniversary of his death. The Academy Library holds Széchenyi's entire oeuvre of manuscripts as well as other important documents of his life and activities,[1] so that in this exhibition the emphasis was placed on presenting his life's work in the form of lesser known (in some cases quite forgotten) texts and pictures, manuscripts and printed matter from various sources that have never previously, or only rarely, been seen by the public.

Inevitably, there was a certain amount of duplication of material in the two exhibitions. But the respective curators had their own interests and ideas, emphasising different aspects of Széchenyi's life and work, so both exhibitions

1 ■ The Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The exhibition was jointly arranged by the Art Collection and the Art History Research Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences

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Nóra Veszprémi
is Chief Curator at the Department of 19th–20th-century Painting of the Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest and the the author of publications on early 19th-century Hungarian art.
We wish to thank Éva Bicskei (Art Collection of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences), Mátyás Gödölle (Hungarian Historical Gallery of the Hungarian National Museum) and Nóra Veszprémi for their help in compiling the illustrations for the articles on Széchenyi in this issue.

Token with the View of the Chain Bridge, 1843, lithograph. Very likely used on the pontoon bridge.
Budapest History Museum

were well worth mounting and visiting. Different people have diverse claims on the greatest Hungarian and can be stubborn in insisting on their version of the truth to suit their own agenda. So it is all the more important that Széchenyi should be presented in light of a large number of sources and shown, not as a static symbol, but through his everyday life and work. Partisans of a wide variety of causes claim him. In such cases it is not Széchenyi as he lived and worked who is the issue but a petrified symbol that can be used and abused for that very reason. That is why an exhibition that shows Széchenyi as he was in the light of a large number of sources could be a revelation to the public.

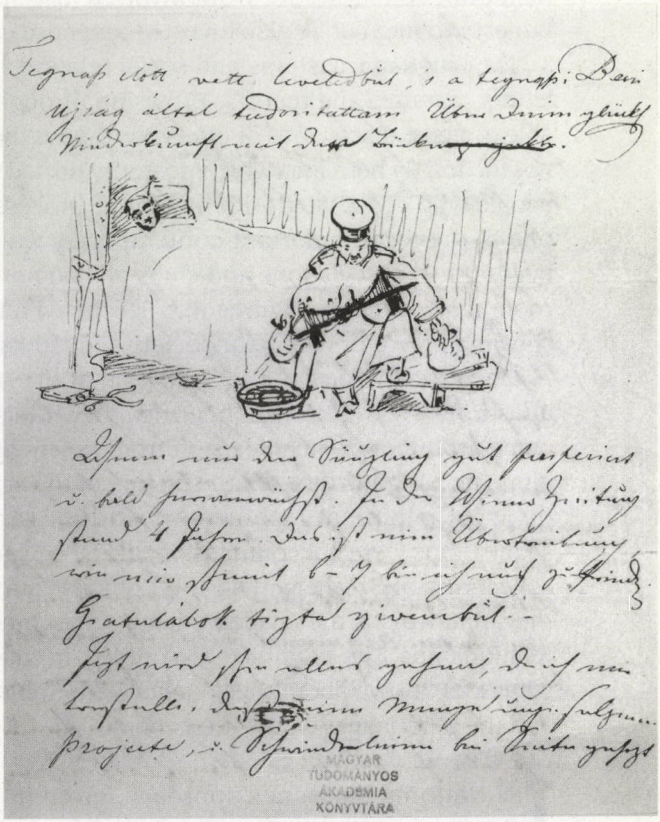
Thus both shows began with Széchenyi's private life, his youth and education. The Academy allowed a glimpse into intimate corners: Franciska, one of his younger sisters, drew caricatures of everyday life in the Széchenyi household, and her pictures give a tantalising taste of the amateur artistic activity then fashionable in aristocratic families, an area which has barely been studied. One of them depicts a custom at Childermas: Papa, Mama, Mari, Fanny and Stefferl (István) ritually flagellate each other "so as to prevent boils and carbuncles". Mementos of adolescent István take us right up to his marriage with Countess Crescence Seilern in 1836. The documents shed light on their relationship with moving details such as a list of the birthdays of his wife's children from her previous marriage drawn up by the newly married Count. Crescence was the wife of Count Károly Zichy when Széchenyi first met her, and it was only after Zichy's death that their legendary love affair could be consummated. The exhibitions give a sense of the ardency of his feelings for the woman who was to inspire and energise him to commit his great deeds. His labours for the public good certainly dovetailed with a burning desire to win public recognition, but Crescence was worth everyone else put together. Széchenyi was a true Romantic, a child of his time. Private and public were inextricable. That is not made so pulsatingly personal at the National Museum as it was at the Academy, the aim there being more on flicking through as many different aspects of the young Széchenyi's life as possible. A furnished interior is followed by display cabinets presenting Széchenyi the traveller, Széchenyi the military man, and

Széchenyi the boy, husband and father. Weapons and garments conjure up the atmosphere of the times, but on the whole their role is just illustrative as most of them have no explicit relation to Széchenyi personally.

Whereas the Academy goes to greater lengths to present the sentimental private individual, the Museum is more concerned with showing the intelligent and many-sided young man of high society, who increasingly became devoted to serving the common good before morphing into the historical icon known as the "Greatest Hungarian". The documents on show at the Academy guided us through various major projects, whereas the National Museum focuses on just one: the Chain Bridge. In an era of mega exhibitions in which the insurance value of objects counts for more than what an exhibition tells the audience, it was bold of both institutions to display so many documents. The more generous budget of the Museum's show enabled them to arrange their material in beautiful and appropriate installations helping us to cope with all that paper. This, however,

Countess Franciska Széchenyi: Papa, Mama, Mari, Steffi, Fanny "So they will not be carbuncular", *watercolour, Childermas between 1810 and 1820*

Széchenyi Collection of the Department of Manuscripts & Rare Books of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences



Caricature showing Széchenyi in confinement. Letter by Count István Waldstein to Count István Széchenyi, 26 September 1838, Trieste, in Hungarian and German.

The newly-born Chain Bridge is fed by its principal financier Baron Georg Sina as wet-nurse..

Manuscript in the Széchenyi Collection of the Department of Manuscripts & Rare Books of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, K 209/95.

changes nothing in essence. It is not the touch screens that open a window on the past but documents which, in themselves, are often inspectacular.

Even to the layman, the engineering blueprints for the Chain Bridge give a visual impression of what building in the 19th century might have been like. Seeming trifles tell a story: a toll receipt, for example, serves as a reminder that Széchenyi fought to ensure that everybody, no matter how high their station, paid to use the bridge, while a printed satirical verse, which dubs Széchenyi a traitor for relying on Georg Sina—a Greek banker based in Vienna—to arrange the financing of the bridge project, evoke the period.

The documents had to speak for themselves at the Academy though the large display cabinets were fine visual artefacts in their own right. The history of the individual projects was covered in minute detail, paying testimony to the often humdrum administrative work involved. Széchenyi not only set the ball of his projects rolling but he also invested immense energy in their execution.

The language, customs and social relationships of the age take shape from letters, minutes and reports. Browsing through them offers the thrill of being able to make discoveries of one's own about the Age of Reform. Széchenyi was not the lonely hero into which posterity turned him: the portraits displayed the people who cooperated with him in the process of reform, in this way reviving one of the most important contemporary ways of honouring someone. The institutions, associations and clubs all had portrait galleries of their own with room for both major figures like Széchenyi and their own members, thereby showing how that particular society defined itself.

One of the virtues of the exhibition at the Academy is the versatility of the questions it asks. Besides historical ones linked to Széchenyi's life, there is much art history which takes off from Széchenyi's person and yet is related to him. The portraits thus tell the history of the Academy's own collection, one of the most important 19th-century portrait galleries in the country. The first acquisitions were not commissioned by the Academy but came from the private collections of Széchenyi and this "official" portrait gallery of the Academy, in the same way as the Academy itself, owes much to this network of personal relationships. The exhibition also added, in smaller ways but still materially, to what was known about these items, with numerous identifications of painters and the personages who sat for them.

The National Museum's approach, given its different profile, hewed more closely to historical and cultural-historical aspects. The subsection concerning the Chain Bridge contains a "mini-exhibition" of art-historical interest devoted to a large canvas by Miklós Barabás (1810–1898), *The Laying of the Foundation Stone of the Chain Bridge,* painted in 1864. It puts the work in the context of other contemporary group portraits and sheds light on how Barabás, the preferred portraitist of the era, depicted the participants based on

earlier portraits of the subjects which he had often painted himself. The painting is in effect a huge tableau—a memorial to the major figures of that age—in the way it juxtaposes readily identifiable likenesses of personages who were still alive in the public memory.

Barabás is a key figure for a historian of Széchenyi and the era in general. In his own field he too was a major organiser and originator. As a portrait painter he had painted just about everybody who was anybody, including Széchenyi on several occasions—good, then, that Barabás was well represented in both exhibitions. At the Academy it was at last possible to view an early portrait of Széchenyi, painted in 1836. In that year Bihar County had decided to commission a portrait of the Count, and Széchenyi had personally recommended Barabás in an open letter, giving his career a major leg-up. The major role that Barabás played in the Széchenyi iconography was captured well by both exhibitions. In the National Museum, in the room where the huge canvas of *The Laying of the Foundation Stone of the Chain Bridge* hangs, other smaller pictures illustrate just why Barabás's works are among the most eloquent documents of the age, including portraits of the bridge's designer, William Tierney Clark (1783–1852) and Adam Clark (1811–1866)—not a relation—who supervised the construction. He not only painted the bridge under construction but also its precursor, a pontoon crossing. This room also gives a good sense of how the Chain Bridge, from the start, was the object of a cult. Relics of all kinds are shown, such as a lump of clay from the foundations, some of the wooden blocks which originally served to pave it, railing ornaments as well as a rivet from the bridge which were turned into souvenirs early in the 20th century.

Széchenyi himself was already revered as a cult figure in his own lifetime, often a subject of what he felt was tiresome homage. The Academy shows some documents which give an idea of this and also of the often moving memorial rites in the years after his death. The National Museum follows the cult right down to the present day with an array of handbills, newspaper articles and other documents, often verging on the comical, showing how Széchenyi's name was used to symbolise a diversity of political aims.

The Academy's display followed its two strands also in presenting changes in the cult: the way one relates to a great man and the manner in which he is portrayed. It turns out that Széchenyi rapidly became the "star exhibit" of the portrait galleries of an ever growing number of societies and other institutions, with copies of earlier pictures being used in many cases. Often the portraits do not give us the likeness of the sitter but tell us how others saw him. This is wittily presented by the exhibition at the Academy in a room where the Széchenyi portraits are on display and what Baron Zsigmond Kemény wrote about him can be read. The bust by Hans Gasser, an Austrian sculptor, was made towards the end of Széchenyi's life, when he spent the last twelve years of his life in a

psychiatric nursing home in Döbling. At a time when he was reluctant to sit for a portrait, it was used as an "authentic" likeness by a number of artists. One example is the truly cult image produced by the painter Béla Schäffer. As far as the Döbling years are concerned, the Academy's presentation emphasises the fact that, for much of the time, Széchenyi continued to be active, writing, and making arrangements. The exhibition also documents Széchenyi's affliction, including heartbreaking images of him in old-age, a sick man feeding pigeons. In April 1848 he was appointed minister of transport in the first independent government of Hungary, but by August he was tormented by visions of an approaching death of the nation, for which he blamed himself. In a torn-up letter he described the deadly struggle that he had been engaged in since becoming a minister as amounting to martyrdom.

Béla Schäffer: The Apotheosis of Széchenyi, 1861, *oil on canvas*
The bust in the painting was made by Hans Gasser.
Hungarian Historical Gallery of Hungarian National Museum, Budapest

By September 1848 his condition had deteriorated. His physician had him admitted to the Bruno Goergen nursing home in Döbling, but he remained a symbolic figure in Hungary. After he took his own life, in the climate of repression of the time, to mourn him offered a way to lament Hungary's failed war of independence and the dreams of the Age of Reform. The Academy presented for the first time a unique collection of items from its archives: silk embroideries by members of the National Association of Housewives. Possibly the most moving single article in the whole exhibition was needlework by Mrs János Damjanich, the widow of one of the Hungarian generals executed by the Austrians at Arad in 1849, in the immediate wake of the war (to this day known as the 13 martyrs of Arad). She embroidered in meticulous detail the family vault in which Széchenyi was laid to rest at Nagycenk, just east of Sopron on the Hungary's border with Austria. Notwithstanding the fact that Széchenyi was a symbol, or the fact that mourning for him was widespread, the way in which his was mourned was not laid down by protocol. The Academy's exhaustive, many-sided and accessible exhibition makes you think that respect for a historical figure can be based on your own personal experiences and discoveries as long as one is willing to do away with empty commonplaces that are often motivated by ulterior motives.

The same result is achieved, albeit in a different way, by the National Museum's exhibition. Whereas the Academy's handling of Döbling and his suicide appealed to emotions, the National Museum's is merciless, even cruel. The basic theme of the room is madness and suicide, albeit the bust by Gasser is there too, and also the works inspired by it which were also shown by the Academy. While visitors view furniture and objects illustrating Széchenyi's busy activity in Döbling and the "press centre" that he operated, a dry voice intones Széchenyi's chosen method for ending his life. These are the notes jotted down by Antal Tolnay, the parish priest of Nagycenk, who, several years after the event, felt obliged to argue against a legend which stubbornly persists to this day: Széchenyi did not commit suicide but was dispatched by a hired assassin of the Habsburg court. The source of that voice is a witty short film clip in which the soundtrack is delivered by silhouettes and is looped to endlessly repeat itself. Inscriptions in the room provide precise details of Széchenyi's derangement as proof that his stay in a mental institution was not the outcome of some dastardly Austrian plot but had very good medical reasons. Széchenyi bordered on mental instability all his life. In 1848 he suffered a full-blown nervous breakdown accompanied by frightening paroxysms of rage.

The exhibition also dispels a final legend, which would have it that the suicide was prompted by Széchenyi's breakdown under the pressure of the events of the 1848 revolution and its aftermath. A diagnostic category of modern times is more likely: borderline personality disorder. It is here, incidentally, that we get at what truly lies behind that picture of him feeding the pigeons: playing the recorder and feeding pigeons were two of the manic behavioural traits shown by him. This seemingly stark, analytical approach does have a purpose, and that is to set itself up against the school of thought which does not permit "great" historical figures to have any human weaknesses, attributting all tragedies to external scheming. The fact is, however, that once we have become familiar with Széchenyi as a sick man, then his true greatness comes to the fore—the way he carried through to the very end his many major projects and also a multitude of smaller matters on his daily agenda even though he was in constant turmoil with his own inner demons. For much of the time he skated magnificently on the brink of despair although when any of his projects failed, he felt all his lifework, all his efforts were in vain. The always strong, healthy and purposeful man of history is not a lifelike figure but a lifeless figment of propaganda who levitates high over real life. The heroism of an oversensitive, passionate, and, indeed, sick man is palpably everyday and real. After all, his efforts were aimed at the prosaic things of life: to cross easily to the far bank of the Danube; to ensure the River Tisza does not flood regularly; that Hungary should have an Academy and that men should exchange ideas in a Casino. The exalted hero can easily be made an ideological tool, but the endeavour creates hollow men; an ordinary, suffering man is however an abiding prototype and inspiration, a possible personal hero for anyone. ❧

Géza Buzinkay

The Döbling "Press Office"

It is often said that Lajos Kossuth was Hungary's first truly modern political journalist. In fact, almost a decade earlier, in 1832, Count István Széchenyi edited *Jelenkor* (Present Day), whose form and content was similar to newspapers elsewhere in Europe. It is therefore not surprising that as his mental condition improved towards the end of the 1850s, he found a way to keep the outside world informed about the real state of affairs inside Hungary, even from his Döbling sanatorium confines, and charted the course of his own recovery and engagement in politics. Even the born-and-bred newspaper man Miksa Falk was taken by the ingenuity and versatility of Széchenyi's ideas (surrounded by informers, he needed every ounce of inventiveness and discretion).

It was not easy to find men who truly understood the situation and the press, enjoyed extensive contacts with journalists and were utterly reliable. In mid-1857, an enduring and zealous supporter introduced Széchenyi to Aurél Kecskeméthy, a superb political journalist whose articles were read the length and breadth of the country. At that time he was an inspector in the police office which examined foreign publications, so he could provide Széchenyi with important publications forbidden in the Habsburg empire. Széchenyi told him to announce himself as "the Pölöske notary" (a popular fictional character) when calling. Later Kecskeméthy came with Miksa Falk, who was on the staff of the liberal Viennese newspaper *Der Wanderer*. Falk brought Széchenyi European papers containing articles about the situation in Hungary normally confiscated by the police. Ernő Hollán was a recognised expert on railway development in Hungary (a cause central to Széchenyi's political design), a corresponding member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and also active as a journalist. This circle of journalists, and the reports of the many visitors Széchenyi received from people from all walks of life, ensured that he was kept up to date on a wide range of subjects.

Géza Buzinkay,
a historian, is Professor of Media Studies, Eszterházy Károly College, Eger.
He has written eleven books on the history of journalism, cultural history and museology.

F. Brunn–Julius Mark: The Goergen mental home in Döbling, *cca 1870, woodcut*
Hungarian Historical Gallery of the Hungarian National Museum, Budapest

The first project of the journalistic fraternity was to write pamphlets in German about conditions in Hungary and Habsburg imperial policies. They used their contacts to get the pamphlets published abroad and distributed to influential political figures in Austria and Hungary, and discussed the subject of every pamphlet. It was known from their character and tone that the pamphlets reflected Széchenyi's views. First off the London presses came Széchenyi's bitingly satirical *Ein Blick auf den anonymen Rückblick* which juxtaposed praise for the policies of Alexander Bach (the minister of the interior, whose name denoted a period in Austro-Hungarian history) with the real situation in the country. The anonymous publication infuriated Bach, who had his men search for the perpetrator as far away as London. The quarters of Széchenyi and his friends were searched on March 3, 1860 for the original manuscripts, but nothing was found.

Széchenyi's son, Béla, had taken the manuscript of *Ein Blick* to London in early December 1858. Béla sought the help of Jácint Rónay (1814–89), a Roman Catholic priest and scholar then living

Reception room used also as a library in Széchenyi's Döbling apartment, end of April 1860 Photograph by Ludwig Angerer
Historical Photo Collection of the Hungarian National Museum, Budapest

there in exile, in finding a publisher. Barely two months passed before the book of more than five hundred pages was printed by George Barclay's office close to Leicester Square (albeit with a fair number of printing errors, as it was a German-language text). Széchenyi's plan was for half the run of two thousand copies to go to bookshops while the other half should be distributed. Béla moved to London to make the arrangements. Thus he met the Marchioness of Stafford, who helped arrange publication

by *The Times* of any further articles smuggled out of Austria as well as arranging with Lord Augustus Loftus, a relative, who until 1860 was H. M. Ambassador in Vienna, to stow one or two copies for a specified list of politicians in regular diplomatic pouches. "There on the list were the names of practically every crowned head, minister [i.e. prime minister], and political notability in Europe," Rónay was to write. He also recorded the outcome of Bach's order that the volumes be confiscated in Vienna. Word about the scandal naturally reached London: "on hearing of the ban the joy of booksellers knew no bounds [...] because the greater the prohibition placed on a publication the greater the demand for them," he noted. Rónay was also the person who took back the manuscript sheet by sheet from the publisher and burned it in his fireplace.

A few months after the publication of *Ein Blick,* Hollán turned up at a Leipzig printer with the manuscript for *Zur ungarische Frage* (Notes on the Hungarian Question), a political programme he had written at Széchenyi's behest. Széchenyi also arranged this to be sent to the Austrian government, but it had no effect. Given the lack of response, next came a renewed attack, a pamphlet entitled *Offenes Schreiben an Franz Josef I* (Open Letter to Emperor Francis Joseph I) by Miksa Falk, again published in London. At the same time, a political essay by Kecskeméthy with the title *Die Lebensfrage Österreichs* (A Life-and-Death Question for Austria) arrived at a printer's in Brunswick. Széchenyi especially liked the latter and enjoyed the fact that, as an inspector, Kecskeméthy was obliged to impound his own work. All of these appeared anonymously, and they even relished talking about them among themselves as being the works of unknown authors.

Even though they were all under police surveillance, they also managed to get articles about the true political situation in Hungary published by a number of influential Western European newspapers with large circulations. Kecskeméthy and Falk, being fully at home in the world of the Vienna press, were in a position to establish contact with the Vienna correspondents of foreign newspapers. Indeed, the overt sympathy for Hungary shown by *The Times'* Vienna correspondent led to diplomatic complications of its own. Széchenyi himself also wrote articles for *The Times,* which were smuggled to London by his son. Kecskeméthy and Falk sent their articles abroad as private letters, also to the novelist Baron Miklós Jósika in Brussels—the "Hungarian Walter Scott" as he was known—who was living in exile after 1848–49. These articles frequently appeared in Brussels, Paris and Germany.

In the autumn of 1859 Jósika made a start on setting up an information bureau and "press centre" for the Hungarian community in exile. "I am in the position to pass on the welcome news," he wrote to an American friend, "The English, French and the better German papers have begun a huge propaganda campaign—on our side." In around 18 months he was able to pass on a growing number of newspaper articles for papers in Western Europe.

The Döbling circle was eventually broken up by repeated police house searches. Széchenyi committed suicide on 8 April 1860, Jósika's press centre came to an end a year later, due to a general change in political climate in Europe. ❧

Mihály Szegedy-Maszák

Concentration, Penetration, Form

Dezső Kosztolányi (1885–1936)

Dezső Kosztolányi occupies something of a unique position in Hungarian literature. He is the only Hungarian author to have succeeded not only in writing first-rate lyric verse and narrative and essayistic prose, but also in producing a wide range of translations of lasting value. He was born in Szabadka, a town in southern Hungary (today Subotica in Voivodina, a province of Serbia), on 29 March 1885, the child of a family whose background reflected the social mobility of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy at the close of the 19th century. His father, Árpád Kosztolányi, traced his origins back to the late 9th century, when Hungarians settled in the Carpathian basin. His mother, Eulália Brenner, was of German bourgeois parentage.

When he was four-and-a-half years old, the young Kosztolányi was taught to read and write by his grandfather, Ágoston Kosztolányi, who soon taught him English as well. His grandfather had fought as a captain in the army of Lajos Kossuth in 1848–49, and after the suppression of the Hungarian War of Independence had gone into exile, first in Turkey and later, having spent forty-two days crossing the storms of the Atlantic, in North America.

The art of Kosztolányi is firmly rooted in the experiences of his early childhood. Fully convinced that man's character develops in childhood and that the memories of one's first years are the chief source of inspiration, he

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Mihály Szegedy-Maszák

is Professor and Chair of Comparative Literature at Eötvös Loránd University and Professor of Central Eurasian Studies at Indiana University. He is the author of Literary Canons: National and International *(2001), twelve books in Hungarian (among them monographs on Zsigmond Kemény, Sándor Márai and Géza Ottlik) and editor-in-chief of a three-volume history of Hungarian literature (2007) and the journal* Hungarian Studies. *His most recent books are* Szó, kép, zene *(2007, on literature and the other arts),* Megértés, fordítás, kánon *(2008, on cultural globalization) and the monograph* Kosztolányi Dezső *(2010)*

made much of his double social allegiance. Taking the long tradition of his father's family as an example, he tended to regard historical continuity as a precondition of culture, while his awareness of the rise of the bourgeoisie made him incline toward liberal tolerance and pragmatism.

In his late autobiographical work, *A bölcsőtől a koporsóig* (From the Cradle to the Grave, 1934), he emphasized the elements of his family legacy that had exerted a considerable influence on his formative years. His paternal great-great-grandfather had left the family estate at Nemeskosztolány (Zemianske Kostolany, Slovakia) in the northwest of Hungary and settled in the southern part of the country. Whatever motives he may have had, the world he left behind was feudal—the Kosztolányis, who dwelled in three old castles, had been the only landowners in the village—whereas the region in which he settled had virtually no nobility. Capitalism developed relatively early in Szabadka, and the Kosztolányis had to adapt themselves to the new conditions. In exile, Ágoston Kosztolányi had been forced to earn his living as a manual labourer in Philadelphia, New York and Boston. When the Compromise of 1867 between the Habsburgs and the Hungarians made it possible for him to return to his country, he opened a dry-goods store. A man of strong character, he made choices for his only son in the spirit of utilitarian positivism: he urged him to study science and made him marry the daughter of a relatively prosperous pharmacist.

As a result, Dezső Kosztolányi felt much more at ease with the bourgeois way of life than most Hungarian writers of his generation. Yet the resistance to a utilitarian view of human existence known to readers of Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* (1854), Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* (1901), or Samuel Butler's *The Way of All Flesh* (1903) was not absent from the world surrounding the young Dezső Kosztolányi. His father had neither the vitality nor the good sense of humour of Ágoston Kosztolányi. A brilliant pupil of Hermann Helmholtz in Germany, he had been asked to become the assistant to the distinguished scientist, but his patriotic father had brought him back to Hungary. Depressed by the provincialism of intellectual life in Szabadka, he took to drink. For his son, it was a humiliating experience to go to a school where the drinking habits of the headmaster—his own father—were a subject of student gossip.

Depression is a mental state frequently expressed in Kosztolányi's early writings. The diary published posthumously in 1938 as part of a biography by his widow shows that around 1900 he was struggling with the idea of nothingness and the dilemma of choosing between the creative activity to which an artist is driven by inner necessity as opposed to work forced upon him from the outside. When playing the piano, which he learned to enjoy from an early age, he was constantly reminded by his grandfather of the need to earn a living. At the age of fifteen he earned some money with his shorthand writing, and until the end of his life he worked hard as a journalist. Aware of

the gap between the bourgeois and the artist, he developed a double identity, and his cycle of stories *Esti Kornél* (Cornelius Nightly, 1933) is an expression of his split personality.

Very early in his life, Kosztolányi found his alter ego in his first cousin József Brenner (1887–1919), who became one of the early followers of Sigmund Freud and wrote short stories using the pen-name Géza Csáth, some of which were translated into English under the title *The Magician's Garden and Other Stories* (Columbia University Press, 1980). The two cousins had much in common; they shared an interest in music. After a few years, however, the differences between their characters became obvious: Csáth's career as a psychiatrist was destroyed by his drug addiction, whereas Kosztolányi developed the sense of self-control characteristic of most artists. He started very early; in 1901 the daily *Budapesti Napló* published one of his poems. His passion for writing seems to have been a natural instinct. In 1903–1904 he studied German and Hungarian at Pázmány University in Budapest. The cosmopolitan world of the second-largest city of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy made a great impact on him. He became a close friend of the philosopher Béla Zalai and the poets Mihály Babits and Gyula Juhász. Not content with the conservative spirit of his professors, he went to Vienna in 1904 to study philosophy. Having given up the idea of becoming a secondary-school teacher, he wrote poems, short stories and articles for a wide range of newspapers.

In 1906 the poet Endre Ady was sent to Paris by *Budapesti Napló* and Kosztolányi was asked to become a permanent contributor. Poems by Ady and Kosztolányi appeared in the same paper on alternate Sundays, and a rivalry developed between the two poets. The correspondence between Mihály Babits and Kosztolányi indicates that the publication of Ady's *Új versek* (New Poems 1906) came to them as a great surprise. In sharp contrast to Ady's two previous volumes, it revealed him to be an innovator, although his rhetoric and pathos seemed to be a belated form of the Romantics' egotist sublime and as such unpalatable to the two younger poets. The tension between Ady and Kosztolányi became public when the latter's first collection of poems, *Négy fal között* (Inside Four Walls, 1907), was published. Ady reviewed it condescendingly for *Budapesti Napló*. Although some of his critical remarks were valid—the volume is undeniably eclectic and uneven—Ady's overall judgment was unjust and premature, as Kosztolányi's early poetry suggests many starting points for later development. It took the younger poet more than twenty years to answer, which he did in a devastatingly cruel but witty reassessment of Ady's poetry published in 1929, ten years after Ady's death.

While Ady was influenced by Baudelaire, Verlaine and Jean Rictus, Kosztolányi drew inspiration from the works of a far wider range of poets, including some of his contemporaries. In 1909 he published *Modern költők* (Modern Poets, 1913),

a pioneering collection of translations. The guiding intention of *Nyugat* (West), a monthly started by members of Kosztolányi's generation in 1908, was not only to bring innovation into Hungarian literature, but also to make Western culture available to Hungarian readers. Paradoxically enough, Kosztolányi, who was convinced of the impossibility of translating poetry, became the most important Hungarian translator of the early 20th century. Having mastered German, English, Latin, French, Italian and Spanish in quick succession, he was able to cover a much wider array of poets and literary traditions than any of his contemporaries. His exceptionally sensitive ear made it possible for him to re-create the individual style of plays by Shakespeare, Molière, Racine, Calderón, Büchner, Chekhov, and Čapek; it also helped him find hidden resources in the Hungarian language through which to render highly idiosyncratic aspects of works by numerous poets, from Villon to Rubén Darío, Donne to Ungaretti, Hölderlin to Antonio Machado, Li Po to Jorge Guillén, Blake to Karl Kraus, the authors of medieval hymns or Japanese haiku to Whitman, Nietzsche, Yeats, Stefan George, Claudel, Valéry, Morgenstern, Marinetti, Blok and Amy Lowell.

Yet for all Kosztolányi's passionate interest in the possibilities of extending the sphere of Hungarian poetic diction, no other poet exerted such a deep influence on his early verse as Rilke. This is especially obvious in his second volume, *A szegény kisgyermek panaszai* (The Laments of a Poor Young Child), a cycle that ran to seven editions and underwent crucial changes between 1910 and 1923. It presents a small boy's vision of plenitude, in contrast to adult life, which brings alienation and materialism. The child seems more human because, as he has not yet learned how to conceal his defencelesness, he is more aware of death. The very first words of the cycle, *"As if he had fallen between the rails,"* take on a symbolic undertone, suggesting that man must live in constant fear of nothingness. The poet speaks from behind the mask of a young boy. The volume immediately attracted the notice of both the critics and the general public. The new parts added in later additions testify to a stylistic development toward Expressionism. The passage beginning with the words, *"The sunflower like a crazy thing,"* for instance, presents the reader with the vision of a yellow flower which, seen from the window of a train, appears to be galloping off, in passionate love with a frightening and drunken sun.

When World War I began, Zalai, Csáth and Kosztolányi's younger brother enlisted. Zalai's death in a prison camp in Siberia was a heavy blow to the poet. Unlike many of his contemporaries, he could not sympathize with the Hungarian Soviet Republic, which came in 1919 in the wake of the war. He was devastated by the peace treaty of Trianon, signed the following year, according to which Hungary lost more than two-thirds of its territory. Csáth committed suicide; Árpád Kosztolányi lost his job after forty years of service; and the poet found himself cut off from his parents, brother, and sister, since Szabadka now belonged to another country.

It hardly need be said that there may be some connection between these painful experiences and the sense of uncertainty that cuts so deep in the stories, poems and articles Kosztolányi wrote during and after the war years. The short story "Káin" (Cain, 1916), an ironic parody of the biblical story, is the most explicitly anti-Christian work ever written by Kosztolányi, reflecting the influence of Nietzsche's nihilistic critique of Christian morality. No less obvious are the allusions to historical events in *A bús férfi panaszai* (The Laments of a Man of Sorrow, 1924), the counterpart of his earlier cycle of poems. The segment beginning with the words, *"I am thirty-two years old now"* suggests a devaluation of human existence. The first nineteen lines are in the present tense and give no more than a flat, complacent description of the speaker's happy state of mind, the result of what he has achieved in his life. After a single line of transition, a brief remark still in the present tense, although referring to the future, the first nineteen lines are repeated, but the present tense is replaced by the past. The slight changes lead to a radical shift in perspective: presence is transformed into absence.

From the beginning of his career Kosztolányi had all the necessary qualities of a writer of short stories: concentration, penetration, form. Half the pleasure in reading his early prose comes from the delight one takes in his sense of form and his power to omit. In his early narrative works sometimes almost nothing is said and almost everything is implied. Things commonly held to be visionary seem to be real, while reality may well be phantasmal, as in "A cseh trombitás" (The Czech Trumpeter, 1907), an imaginative rewriting of E. T. A. Hoffmann's "Ritter Gluck".

Having published several collections of stories, in the 1920s he emerged as a major novelist. *A véres költő* (The Bloody Poet, 1922) is a pseudo-historical novel. Kosztolányi read works by Suetonius, Tacitus and Seneca closely and consulted a Classical scholar before he started rewriting the story of Nero. Firmly convinced that history is a reintepretation of the past in the light of the present, he expressed his vision of the Hungarian Soviet Republic in a chapter entitled "Revolution." He went out of his way to assert that circumstances turned Nero into a monster. In the first chapter he is an innocent boy, horrified by the scene in which his mother, Agrippina, poisons her husband, the emperor Claudius. When put on the throne by his greedy and ambitious mother, he feels nothing but solitude: political institutions are alien to him. Little by little, however, he comes to realize that what seems to be mysterious is in fact nothing but a manifestation of mean-mindedness. The chaos in his soul is presented as a reflection of the anarchy that surrounds him. First manipulated by Agrippina, he later learns how to use her weapons. Once Nero has lost his sense of any higher principle that might control human actions, Agrippina, Britannicus, the son of the previous emperor and Seneca must die, in succession. Nero is shrewd enough to see that the leaders of the revolution can only bring about a new form of tyranny. It is a supreme irony that even Seneca

is presented as vulnerable to the destructive forces driving the emperor. As Nero's teacher, he is, after all, largely responsible for the formation of the emperor's character. The philosopher's life seems at odds with his Stoic principles, and the conflict suggests that he cannot live up to his ideals. Nero feels a bitter satisfaction when Seneca calls Britannicus a traitor after having received the dead man's property as an imperial grant.

The Bloody Poet, a novel that was successful internationally in a German translation by Stefan I. Klein (with an introduction by Thomas Mann), is partly about action and creation. Britannicus is a born poet and an entirely passive man, whereas Nero is a would-be artist who cannot understand that poetry cannot be written by a man of action. One of the most amusing chapters is about a competition of actors in which the Emperor is to win first prize. Although the audience is given detailed instructions and is closely watched by members of the secret police, the Emperor is paralyzed by stage fright and can hardly begin his miserable performance. His naive cult of theatricality is a far cry from the highly sophisticated poetry of Britannicus, written in solitude. Yet it would be misleading to assume that the contrast drawn between the characters is based solely on an opposition between the contemplative and the active life. Believing that it was neither the poet's business nor within his competence to change society, Kosztolányi associated the utopia expressed by Ady's political poems with artistic flaws. When creating his Britannicus, he asserted his anti-didactic view of art, but he also raised a question about the possible link between creation and a sense of the transcendental. There is a hint in the novel that the son of Claudius, the author of short, cryptic poems, may converse with a world that transcends the human sphere. If this is so, Kosztolányi's novel about imperial Rome may represent an early stage in its author's painful struggle with the implications of a post-Nietzschean world; it may ask whether man can live without the idea of a higher form of existence.

A similar question is raised in *Pacsirta* (Skylark, 1924), a somewhat shorter novel that Deborah Eisenberg characterized as "quiet, shattering, perfect" in a long article praising Richard Aczel's fine translation in *The New York Review of Books* on April 8, 2010. The title of the novel is a pet name given to a spinster by her parents, and the action takes place in Sárszeg (literally "a muddy place"), a caricature of Kosztolányi's native Szabadka. On a certain Friday, in the last year of the 19th century, Skylark takes a train to visit relatives, leaving her parents behind. Unhappy away from home, she is impatient to return after a week. For some reason or another, the train is late, and her father secretly hopes she has met with a fatal accident; but she arrives safely and is escorted home by her loving parents.

On the one hand, *Skylark* is a psychological novel focused on the father, Ákos Vajkay, whose lack of skill in verbal communication runs counter to the

depth of his inner life. At this stage of his career, Kosztolányi was a close friend of the psychoanalyst Sándor Ferenczi. While his daughter is away, Vajkay visits the Casino, the local gentleman's club, where he is surrounded by people whose verbosity is proportionate to their superficiality. In the world of the novel the ability to communicate is opposed to depth of character.

Yet the novel has wider implications. The futility of the functioning of the Casino becomes symbolic of a mentality without any sense of purpose, a nihilism that is presented as a characteristic of the Habsburg Monarchy at the turn of the century. The members have given up their hopes. One of them, a teacher who as a young man was a talented scholar, does nothing but drink for days on end. Werner, a Moravian lieutenant who has not learned a single word of Hungarian during his four-year stay in Sárszeg, will be remembered chiefly for the incident in which he gets dead drunk, takes a steam bath in full uniform, and goes for a walk dripping wet.

An advocate of alternative readings, Kosztolányi often provides more than one key for interpreting his novels. Besides being a psychological novel and a satire of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, *Skylark* is also a narrative about man's relation to the Christian heritage. Although brought up by a grandfather who hated the Habsburgs, after World War I, the Soviet Republic, and the redrawing of the map of Europe, Kosztolányi had become fully aware of the ambiguities of the Dual Monarchy, social backwardness and (opposition to) intellectual innovation. At first sight, the members of the Casino are ridiculed; on second thoughts, however, their sense of futility may seem to represent a kind of wisdom. The Monarchy on the eve of the end of the 19th century seems to represent a stage in history in which people have ceased to believe that mankind is moving toward some goal. The Sárszeg of 1899 is presented as an epitome of a loss of aims that the whole world must face sooner or later.

Having left her parents behind, Skylark bursts out crying on the train that is taking her to see her relatives. A young, handsome boy, assuming she is unwell or has recently come to some grief, is eager to help her. Skylark reacts with impatience and even anger, while she seems grateful to her other fellow traveller, a poor, elderly Catholic priest, who shows complete indifference to her suffering. The meaning of this short scene is ambiguous. The priest's behaviour may suggest that salvation is to be sought in the next world, or the heroine's attitude might indicate that human existence as such is tragic: compassion is pointless, because suffering cannot be eliminated; we live in constant anxiety in the face of nothingness.

Love conceals hatred; what seems to be provinciality is in fact wisdom. Values are ambivalent in *Skylark,* and the same is true of *Aranysárkány* (1925, the title means both "the golden dragon" and "the golden kite"), another novel set in Sárszeg. This work, the most complex if not the best of Kosztolányi's novels,

clearly shows how strongly he reacted against the positivism of the late 19th century. The suicide of the hero, Antal Novák, a grammar-school teacher, is highly motivated: the humiliation he must undergo—he is beaten by his former pupils, who did not pass their final examinations, and his only child, Hilda, escapes from the paternal home—makes it clear to him that his conception of the world has been unduly rationalistic.

There are at least three kinds of interrelated time in *Aranysárkány*. Everyday life in Sárszeg follows the rhythms of natural cycles. The narrator's focus on Novák is justified precisely because he differs from his colleagues in the sense that he is aware of another form of time. Shortly before his daughter's journey, he is looking at the stars through his telescope, lecturing her about a cosmic *longue durée* quite frightening because indifferent to man. By contrast, the third mode of temporality is emphatically human. Teachers, students and merchants all have such different conceptions of time in this novel that they can hardly communicate with one another. Psychological time seems to be autonomous, and this is reflected in the idioms spoken by the characters: they use almost incompatible languages, dependent on individual sensibility and social, professional and generational factors. Chapter 14, for example, is about the last day spent in school by those in their final year. The headmaster makes a speech, taking it for granted that life begins at the end of one's school years. While listening to his words, Novák disagrees; his conviction is that the last day spent at school marks the end of human life. This scene suggests that although only the present exists, it has no dimensions; only hopes and memory can have duration. For the young, the future provides the illusion of freedom; for adults, the past represents an intimacy and spontaneity they have lost.

Much impressed by Nietzsche's critique of traditional principles of evaluation, Kosztolányi was fully convinced that things have no value in themselves; all evaluations are made from a specific perspective. The very title of the novel reflects this perspectivism. It refers to an object, a kite, but as a signifier it is ambiguous. Kosztolányi believed that language was never transparent, and he exploited the fact that the Hungarian equivalents of "kite" and "dragon" are homonyms *("sárkány")*. The gold-coloured kite is flying high up in the sky when seen by the teachers going to school early in the morning in the opening chapter. Some view it as a bad omen, while others see it as a mere toy. To reassure a superstitious colleague of the harmlessness of the golden "dragon," Novák mentions that he will speak about kites when teaching Benjamin Franklin's experiments with electricity, but the very word he employs—*"istennyila"*, a metaphor for "kite" literally meaning "God's arrow"—suggests menacing forces behind everyday reality, forces Novák fails to recognize.

His fatal mistake lies in his ignorance of the role irrationality plays in life. His favourite composer is Robert Schumann, but he seems unaware of the fact

that the German composer spent his final years in an insane asylum, just as he is unaware of the chaos within himself. Viewing pupils as objects, he is unable to understand stupidity and passion. Forced in the end to take note of them, all he can do is admit failure and commit suicide. When writing the novel, Kosztolányi turned his back on one of the most influential traditions of 19th-century fiction, that of the *Bildungsroman* (novel of education). His prose reveals the same interest in the potential relations between different textual formations as one finds in his verse. Novák's fate is summed up when he remembers the words, *Quem dii odere,* the first part of a maxim that ends with *paedagogum fecere* (The gods hated him, so they made him a teacher). In *Skylark*, the heroine's letter to her parents, a fictitious document, creates intertextual relations. *The Bloody Poet* is headed with words by Tacitus and Suetonius, and one finds a similar technique in *Anna Édes* (1926, literally "Anna the Sweet"); in this case the text is preceded by a Latin prayer.

To a certain extent *Anna Édes* could be called a novel about recent history. The story begins on 31 July 1919. The dictatorship of the proletariat has just fallen. Ficsor, the concierge in the house of Kornél Vizy, a civil servant, is eager to make his landlord forget about his behaviour during the Soviet Republic. From March 21, when the Communists took over, through the end of July he had been a spokesman for the "oppressed classes" vis-à-vis the bourgeoisie, but now he wants to render a service to Vizy in order to give the impression that he had never supported the Soviet Republic. Mrs. Vizy, a middle-aged woman who has been harassed by the Communists, is about to fire her maid, so Ficsor will bring her a new girl.

There may be something symbolic in the fact that Anna, the new maid, was born in 1900. In any case, her fate seems to suggest that the 20th century is radically different from the previous one. The intimacy of domestic life and the optimism based on a belief in the victory of science and technology have been replaced by unresolved tensions. The peasant girl, who seems to be an ideal maid, murders Kornél Vizy and his wife. Far from suggesting the possibility of any political solution, the novel portrays the relationship between employer and employee, the middle class and the poor as damaging to both sides. The Soviet Republic is presented as a dead end. (In the early 1950s this novel was not published, and the text that was published after 1956 was censored. Unfortunately, the translation by George Szirtes that appeared in 1991 is based on the expurgated version.) Anna is viewed from the inside as an inarticulate person who cannot understand her situation. The novel is a remarkable attempt to present a character who is hardly accountable because she is almost entirely unable to communicate.

During the 1920s linguistics gradually replaced psychology as Kosztolányi's chief interest. He developed an aversion to the use of foreign words and organized a purist movement. "It is possible to know a foreign language, but it is impossible to know it well," he wrote in 1922 in "Nyelvtudás" (On the

Knowledge of Languages). In 1930 he sent a long letter to Antoine Meillet, then professor at the Collège de France, and took issue with the eminent scholar's complaint about the linguistic division of Europe made in his influential book *Les langues dans l'Europe nouvelle* (1928). The Hungarian author accused the French linguist of considering thought prior to and separate from language. He regarded Meillet as a belated exponent of the rationalism inherited from some seventeenth and eighteenth century thinkers who envisaged a universal language modelled on mathematics. By the late 1920s Kosztolányi became fully convinced that different languages created divisions in the world and imposed different value systems. His hypothesis that speech communities select, classify, organize, abstract and evaluate experience differently somewhat echoes Wilhelm von Humboldt's ideas, which he may have learned about during his studies at the University of Vienna. Politically, his language-oriented cultural relativism involves an unlimited tolerance of the other. In his articles he takes black music and old Chinese poetry as examples of his claim that any convention seems to be natural for the members of the community in which it has evolved.

His theoretical insights and creative writing are clearly interrelated. In the essay "A tíz legszebb szó" (The Ten Most Beautiful Words, 1933) he distinguished between translators working on the plane of the signified and those focusing on the signifier, indicating that he himself preferred to concentrate on the latter. At a time when the Russian formalists developed methods of close reading, he was the only critic in Hungary to practice a similar approach to literature. Many of his essays on individual authors, foreign and Hungarian, early and contemporary, are textual analyses of individual works. In one of the earliest of these, "Tanulmány egy versről" (The Close Reading of a Poem, 1920), a thorough examination of Goethe's *Über allen Gipfeln,* he summed up the principles underlying his organicist view of literature and wrote of the disappearance of the creator in his work, ideas that closely resemble those of Mallarmé, Valéry, and Joyce. In 1928, in "Káté az írásról" (ABC of Writing), he ascribed similar characteristics to the novel.

Kosztolányi's insights as translator and essayist into the relation between language and thought are reflected in *Cornelius Nightly,* the cycle of stories mentioned earlier. The book represents a major shift in emphasis: psychological authenticity is replaced by the ideal of a text that creates rather than reflects meaning. The first of the eighteen chapters of the book published in 1933 presents the eponymous hero as the best friend of the anonymous narrator. Together they plan to compose a work that will have none of the conventional continuity of novels and will be based on the hypothesis that language speaks for us. The chapters are loosely tied together and the relationship between the two friends becomes complex when the eponymous hero becomes the narrator in approximately half of the chapters. The concept of the stable self is clearly

rejected. While the opposition between the anarchism of the eponymous hero and the conventional lifestyle of his anonymous friend seems to be clear at the beginning of the book, soon the distinction becomes blurred. The ideal of a well-made plot is discarded. The narrators have no claim to traditional credibility.

The cycle has a counterpart in *Esti Kornél kalandjai* (The Adventures of Cornelius Nightly), printed as one of the five subtitled sections of *Tengerszem* (Tarn, 1936), Kosztolányi's last prose collection. In the earlier volume, the chapters are numbered, whereas in the later cycle they have titles, but the same metaphors are used in both. In the eighth chapter of the 1933 book, Pali Mogyoróssy, a journalist, turns mad and is taken to a lunatic asylum. The text ends with a scene in which Mogyoróssy finds himself in a building with endless corridors and no exit. Man's futile attempt to find a way out of a labyrinth seems to symbolize the act of dying. The mirror, a surface giving the impression of the infinite, is a metaphor for art. In the last story of the second cycle, "Az utolsó fölolvasás" (The Last Reading), the two key metaphors are combined. Having become a writer, Cornelius Nightly is about to read from his works for a distinguished audience, but he cannot find his way to the room where people are waiting for him. Lost in a building that seems to have no way out, he has a stroke and falls. His dead body is found facing a mirror as if he were still looking at himself.

While working on the two cycles, Kosztolányi also tried to find new modes of expression in lyric poetry. The origins of this experimentation can be traced back to *Meztelenül* (Naked, 1928), a collection of free verse. *Számadás* (A Summing Up), containing ninety-six poems, was published as the final section of *Kosztolányi Dezső összegyűjtött költeményei* (Dezső Kosztolányi's Collected Poems, 1935). Introduced by a sequence of seven self-addressing sonnets that gives its title to the collection as a whole, it is widely regarded as one of the great achievements in Hungarian poetry. The interrelations with the prose cycles are emphasized by the poem *Esti Kornél éneke* (The Song of Cornelius Nightly), an ars poetica. Comparing the poem to a riddle, the speaker insists that its surface should be sophisticated enough to resists superficial approaches. Style must be governed by economy, "a semblance of depths."

Economy is indeed a characteristic feature of Kosztolányi's late verse. An extreme case is the three-line "Októberi táj" (October Landcape). Having translated numerous Japanese poems, he wished to create a text so terse that it would remind the reader of the haiku. Like some of its models, this poem contains a vision of a season and sentences that are joined without any apparent causality. What makes "October Landscape" remarkable is the way he hints at the interrelations between the human and the natural world. A similar tension can be felt in the fifteen-line "Vörös hervadás" (Red Withering). The title itself, an

oxymoron suggestive of both life and death, contains in embryo the paradox elaborated in the poem: existence is made meaningful by the nothingness that follows it. Autumn may suddenly be transformed from a symbol of plenitude to one of alienation, as "Őszi reggeli" (Atumn Breakfast), the ten-line poem immediately following "Red Withering" further suggests. The twelve-line "A vad kovács" (The Wild Blacksmith) presents suffering as the only path to knowledge, and a similarly stern interpretation of human existence is expressed in other late poems. In 1933 Kosztolányi discovered a malignant tumour in his mouth, which he immediately associated with cancer. This may have strengthened his preoccupation with death and stoicism, although both had been prominent characteristics of his work from the beginning of his career.

If there is a difference between his earlier and later stoicism, it lies in a shift in emphasis: while in the early 1920s he had been an avid reader of Seneca, by the second half of the decade he developed an interest in the ideas of Marcus Aurelius, the Roman emperor whose *Meditations* were composed between 170 and 180 in Pannonia, a territory that later became Western Hungary. One of the four pieces in *Latin arcélek* (Roman Profiles), a section in *Tarn,* is about Aurelius, who maintained that principles could never be realized in practice, injustice could thus never be eliminated, and it was futile to seek vengeance. The poem "Marcus Aurelius", one of the earliest pieces in *A Summing Up*—it was written four years before Kosztolányi learned of his illness—is about a man who was both an artist and a thinker. It suggests that life has to be viewed from the perspective of death. All individuals take on true moral significance at the moment of death because the disappearance of any human being from this world involved the loss of a world that represented irreplaceable values. This idea underlies "Halotti beszéd" (Funeral Oration), written as an imitation of a piece of twelfth-century Hungarian prose and a poem by Rubert Brooke (1887–1915), who served in World War I and died of septicæmia on the way to the Dardanelles.

"Hajnali részegség" (Daybreak Drunkenness), the penultimate poem in *A Summing Up*, is a long meditation. The last two lines—*"Still, I may have been the guest of a grand and unknown Lord"*—suggest a vague admission of some distant transcendental power. With supreme irony, the last poem, *Ének a semmiről* (Song of Nothing), presents the soul as a stranger in this world and suggests that man is more familiar with nothingness than being.

By the time *A Summing Up* was published, Kosztolányi was gravely ill. He visited specialists in Stockholm three times, he had eleven blood transfusions, and he survived nine operations. In a desperate attempt to escape from the boredom of his marriage, he began a love affair with a married woman whose maiden name was Mária Radákovics. "Szeptemberi áhítat" (September Ecstasy), a poem published in the October 1935 issue of *Nyugat,* is a fine love poem written for her. *Tarn* includes numerous stories that focus on

death. One of these, "Caligula", the last of the *Latin Profiles,* a story with a close-knit structure, suggests that irrationality cannot be eliminated because it is an inalienable characteristic of existence.

One of the many operations Kosztolányi underwent robbed him of his voice, and he was left able to communicate only in writing. He died in Budapest on 3 November 1936. At the time of his death he was generally regarded as one of the best Hungarian writers of his age. His reputation continued to rise over the next decades, with posthumous publications that represented significant additions to his oeuvre. From the poets Attila József and Sándor Weöres to novelists Sándor Márai and Géza Ottlik, prominent members of the next generation drew inspiration from his works. There was only one period when his influence declined: from the late 1940s to 1956 his works were not published at all. As of the 1960s an increasing number of poets and prose writers came to view him as a precursor: the poet Dezső Tandori continued his experiments with montage and the novelist Péter Esterházy, the author of a book entitled *Esti* (Nightly, 2010), took his cycles of short stories as a starting point for his deconstructions of narrative continuity. His poetry and narrative fiction have been translated into other languages and his essays have given an impetus to Hungarian literary scholarship. In 2010 I completed a new monograph on his work containing a detailed analysis of his activity as novelist, short-story writer, essayist, critic, journalist, and translator, and the first two volumes of the critical edition of his works were published. A priest of the art of writing in his lifetime, he is now one of the most widely read authors in Hungary and a figure of international reputation to whom numerous other writers have paid homage, from Thomas Mann to Miroslav Krleža and Danilo Kiš. ❧

Dezső Kosztolányi

The Last Reading

(Short story)

As usual, he hopped up on the train at the last moment. He tossed his suitcase into one of the compartments. The wheels began to trundle down the tracks.

It was a dark winter afternoon.

He gazed out of the window drowsily, his eyes bloodshot from his vigils. He gazed at the fields of snow, the rooks fluttering above them, a black and white landscape painting, then yawned, his mouth gaping wide as if he wanted to swallow the whole thing, drew the curtain so as not to have to see anything, and, as he always did when something new lay before him or something completed behind him, he lit up.

On this occasion his trip lay before him, and boarding and departure behind him. So as soon as he had smoked his first cigarette, he lit a second.

He was journeying to a town in the countryside to give a reading.

How many readings have I given, he wondered to himself, perhaps a hundred, if not a hundred and fifty, for some two-and-half decades now. Sometimes I call it duty, sometimes drudgery. In truth, it's the meaning of my life, its fulfilment, its day of celebration: so-called renown. There is no finer experience of travel than to glance into an unfamiliar city, watch the children traipsing home from school on the snow-covered streets at sunset, steal a bit of community from their fraternal group, sniff out a restaurant, walk the length of the main street, then rush off to the hotel, preparing, and journeying onward the next day after a brief euphoria of applause and champagne as if the whole thing had been nothing more than a dream. I have so many memories from these readings! I remember Sunday lunches, because I usually came down on Saturdays and on Sunday they insisted on having me as their guest, the golden broths of the Sunday lunches, swimming with meat dumplings, the strident, almost gallant reds of the tomato sauces, the towering edifices of cake. I remember friends gone astray, moss-grown classmates who popped up unexpectedly against the backdrop of my room the morning after the reading,

while I still lounged half asleep in bed, on their faces smiles apologetic but accusatory, reminders that though forgotten, nameless, they were yet here, in this world. I remember a warm-hearted family that hosted me as their guest, the room they gave me, which they had made so comfortable and homelike that I felt neither comfortable nor at home in it, and even when I found myself alone, I nonetheless continued to nod and smile, as if my endearing hosts, who monitored my every move from the far side of the wall, had still been close at hand, and when I wanted to wash, they pumped the water into the makeshift wash-basin themselves. I remember admirers who sprung on me from behind a pillar on a street corner and presented a book with a request for my inscription, and amateur writers who handed me their manuscripts as if submitting some petition of vital importance to a king, bound with the roses of homage or slyly concealing a threat, like assassins would a dagger. I remember a coffeehouse in Nagyvárad from the olden days of peace before the war, where to my disbelief the waiters debated which of last Sunday's sonnets had born a stronger "smell of life." I remember kind old women who had suspected me of looking down on their masterworks of cooking, because, alas, they were not quite the same as what was served in the capital, and they were either surprised that I didn't eat enough or that I ate so much, and though a poet, did not scorn such prosaic things. I remember being dragged to see an orphanage or a slaughterhouse, an art gallery or a hospital for patients suffering from contagious disease, how I gave my expert's opinion, understated but admiring, on everything, me, who understands nothing but writing. And I remember girls and women who brought me the whims and lots of chance. Everything is inextricably intertwined in these trips, which are never the same and yet always repeat themselves. How lovely they were, he sighed. How lovely it would be to live yet a bit.

It was almost eight o'clock. Cornelius Nightly yanked open the curtain. Outside the level plain of snow was as black as the crows. Curls of thick, impenetrable fog had settled over everything. "The reading starts at nine," he thought, "I don't have time to do anything other than change in the hotel." He stretched. He pulled a brown bottle from the upper pocket of his waistcoat. He took something that immediately made his eyes begin to shine. He lit up again. A few minutes later beams of light from illuminated cupolas broke through the darkness, water-tanks and factory chimneys gestured to him, and the conductor announced that they had arrived.

He gave his suitcase to a porter and hopped down, between the tracks. An amorphous group was approaching him, the industrious president of the city's Cultural and Educational Society, his young wife, and a pale, unfamiliar young man who spoke not a word. As his hosts usually did on his arrival, they asked him how the trip had been, had it not been too tiring, and after he mumbled something in reply they sat him in a car, told him there was "tremendous

interest" in the upcoming evening all over the city, though "they had not sold every ticket," and they took him to the hotel, the Golden Eagle, in the second wing of which he would find the stage, so he need do little more than stroll over.

The pale, unfamiliar young man, the organizer of the evening, accompanied him to the foyer of the hotel with "extraordinary tact and discretion," waited for him to step into the elevator, and departed.

The elevator was clattering to the core when Nightly noticed with surprise something that reminded him that there might yet be something that could surprise him. Never had he been inside such an unusual provincial hotel. The elevator kept hurtling onward, now for minutes on end, ever higher.

"Where are we going," he asked the little boy.

"Up," he replied, poking upwards with his index finger.

"What floor?"

To this the boy gave no reply, because the elevator juddered once or twice more, then with a great clatter came to a stop. Without saying a word the boy took his bags down the long, narrow corridor, along the floor of which grey reed carpeting ran past the uniform grey doors.

"After you, sir," he said.

"This is my room?" Nightly asked, and he went going to the middle of the room, stale with the air of steam-heating, and looked around.

He observed a large mirror, the bed to one side, in front of him a divan. He nodded and sent the boy on his way. He looked out the window. Below, far below, the little houses of a small town lay scattered in the mountains, their windows glowing warm with yellow lamplight, like the unforgettable set of his childhood playhouse. For some time he stood gazing, enrapt. Rooks circled around a squat stone tower in the steady snowfall.

"Hurry up," he urged himself, and he set about preparing himself for the evening.

The blade of his razor slid with a shrill ring across his face. He washed up with warm water, then the shirt, vest, and tie, as white as the snow outside, flew one after the other from his suitcase, followed by jacket, pants, and shoes, as black as the rooks.

He whistled the Bach *Air* to himself and mused over what he would do that evening on stage. To be on the safe side he folded a few of his recent scribblings into his pocket. He combed his hair in front of the mirror, bowing this way and that, and he noticed with pleasure that he was tall and had not entirely withered with age.

"Let's go," he directed himself, stepping into the corridor, the long, narrow corridor down which he had walked with the boy, with its grey reed carpeting and uniform grey doors, but only now did he realize how long it was and how narrow. Somewhere towards the end a mirror glimmered dimly, reflecting the long, narrow corridor, with its grey carpeting and endless row of uniform grey

doors. As he wanted to reach the stage as soon as possible, he hurried towards the mirror in the hope that he would find an exit or staircase. But he was disappointed. As he drew closer it became apparent that what he saw in the mirror was not a reflection, but rather reality. This corridor was endless. What grandiose pomp for the middle of nowhere, he grumbled, curling his lips into a frown. He hurried on with irritation. "Seems I have lost my way again," he said, agitated but with a smile to a waiter. The waiter explained to him that he must go back the way he had come, the opposite direction, and again it looked as if somewhere in the distance a mirror glimmered, but again there was no mirror, just the corridor, with its innumerable doors and rooms.

He must have wandered for some five or six minutes before another waiter directed him to go right, then a third to go left. It must have been well past nine-thirty. He was anxious that he would be late for the reading and miss it entirely. He lost his patience and, beside himself, began to dash to and fro, up and down, running from one floor to the next, but everywhere the disheartening labyrinth of uniformity awaited him. Eventually he began to pound on the iron railings of the elevator. The elevator stopped, the boy stepped out, and he stepped in. Again it began to soar upwards at a dizzying speed, then to plunge down for unbearably long minutes. Nightly stomped his feet and shouted that he wanted to get off.

At that, they arrived at the long, narrow corridor from which they had started. He found the door to his room open, inside the disorder of changing clothes, his soapy razor in the basin. He stood in front of the mirror and observed his white face and sweaty brow. He knew what would come next, but it interested more than horrified him. He was surprised that this was all there was to the whole thing.

While the boy ran to fetch a doctor, he fumbled for his brown bottle and took another dose from it.

"Why do you use this?" asked the doctor reproachfully, and took it from his hand.

"Because on the earth children are dying."

The doctor established that he was raving and his eyes were crossed. He tried to take his pulse, but he could no longer find it. He wanted to sit him down in a chair. At that Nightly tumbled full length to the floor. He fell in front of the mirror, his eyes bulging from their sockets. The pale young man ran in. Gasping for breath, he demanded to take the esteemed author to the stage.

He saw with alarm what had happened.

"Interesting," he noted. "He's still looking at himself in the mirror."

"Yes," nodded the doctor. "Just like an artist. Though he's already dead." ❧

(1935)

Translated by Thomas Cooper

Dezső Kosztolányi

Caligula

(Short story)

1

When the workers started to demolish it, the statue of Jupiter began to cackle. The conspirators considered it an auspicions sign. Caligula turned to the oracle of Antium and was given the following warning from the temple of Fortuna.

"Beware Cassius."

2

Charea Cassius, the head officer of the guardsmen and the leader of the rebels, stood pale, encircled by his followers. Every eye was turned on him. They sensed that Caligula's invisible gaze also rested on the old centurion, and his heart and brain were already aflame with suspicion.

Soon the news spread that Caligula had executed Cassius Longinus, his proconsul of Asia, instead of him.

"Is he mad," Cassius wondered. "Or is he toying with us all? It seems he has forgotten all about me."

He had not forgotten. At six o'clock the next morning he summoned him for questioning.

Cassius bid farewell to his wife and children. He hastened to the palace like one going to his death, by sword, dagger, or poison.

3

Caligula had been awake since three. He was never able to sleep later. He was tormented by lurid phantasms and haunting nightmares. After several hours of fitful sleep he rose, had himself borne to each of the chambers of the palace by torch and lamplight, dismissed his servants, and continued to roam alone, his hunched back stooped, like the gangling monster of a nightmarish vision lurching to and fro on thin, wobbly legs. He awaited the coming dawn.

He leaned out one of the windows. In the frigid, lead-grey January sky his glistening beloved was resplendent, the moon, whom he had always longed to clasp in his arms. She did not look his way, but hurried along betwixt the dirty green clouds above Rome. He spoke to her, mutely, with his ever fretting tongue.

In the meantime day had begun to break.

4

"Cassius," he greeted his guest, opening his bare, hairy arms. "Come, to my bosom," he shouted, embracing him.

Terrified, Cassius submitted.

Cassius had prepared himself for many things. He had heard that years ago Caligula had summoned the conspirators to his chamber, pressed his sword to his chest and offered to slay himself if they so wished, churning their stomachs with his buffoonery. He had heard that the emperor had ordered a nobleman to the palace in the night and danced for him. He had heard that he had let the cobbler who had called him an impostor go unpunished. But this surprised him.

5

"Help me, Cassius," he continued. "I trust you. I am surrounded by dangers. The palatines begin their games today. I am naming you, Cassius, the commander of my guardsmen.

He glanced at him, his eyes flaring restlessly, then erupted with laughter. Cassius bowed hesitantly. The emperor sank into a chair, for he was feeble and could not bear to stand long on his thin legs, which soon caved in like a pair of empty boots.

6

"Sit down next to me," he assured the centurion. "How old are you?"

"Fifty-eight."

"I am twenty-nine," he said in a hurried splutter. "Still young. And you, what are you after you aged skirt chaser! But I have suffered, Cassius, terribly! In my childhood Tiberius my uncle looked after me, the old, blood-stained tiger. He killed off my entire family. He had my mother banished and forced her to commit suicide. He had my younger brother Brutus imprisoned and sentenced him to death by starvation. He wanted to have me killed as well. When I was but a boy, he kept me under the constant watch of his spies and informants to see if I would betray myself and speak ill of him. When I slept they leaned over me and waited to hear what I might say in my dreams. At any moment they could have mixed poison in with my food. I however remained silent, awake or asleep. I lied. I pulled a mask over my face. I played my part, better than the dark, taciturn old man. I triumphed over him. I saved my own life. And then suddenly everything was allowed. I tried to live. I failed. I wanted to tear off my

mask. Again, I failed. My little sister Drusilla, the goddess, died of a raging fever. I was left alone. In my grief I grew a beard and I looked at the world around me. At first I laughed to think that I could have had anyone I cared to killed. I adored gold. When I was no longer satisfied simply to possess it, I stripped naked and rolled in it, that it might seep through my skin into my blood. I grimaced in the mirror, that I might affright myself. I contrived some good jests too. I had people's tongues torn out, had them sawn in half. I had hundreds of voyagers flung into the sea and was bemused to watch them thrash and flounder to their deaths. I had the citizens of Rome starved, though my granaries were full. I had the manuscripts of great renowned writers destroyed. Every day I had the statues of the Gods on the field of Mars garbed in clothes like mine, then I had their heads cut off and replaced with my image. I had a marble stable built for my horse and a manger of ivory. I lunched together with him in the stable and almost succeeded in having him named consul. There was a time when I was adored. The soldiers called me by endearing nicknames, "moppet" and "precious." In Rome they slaughtered one-hundred-sixty-thousand brute beasts in three months to celebrate my rise to the throne. Now all this bores me. I cannot sleep. My eyelids grate and creak. They tell me the trouble is here," he said, rapping his head with a rod of gold. "Give me sleep, some elixir bearing dreams."

7

Cassius listened, almost moved by what he heard, but Caligula suddenly rose and extended his hand to bid goodbye. Cassius kissed it. But then he realized that his lips were brushing the nail of the emperor's thumb, folded derisively between the index and middle finger of his outstretched hand.

The blood rushed to his face.

"Orangutan!" Caligula waved him off. "Don't be cross with me. Be watchful." And he dismissed him.

8

Cassius recounted to his fellow conspirators what had happened.

"Slay him!" cried Cornelius Sabinus. "Strike him down and stab him to death."

The celebratory games and festivities began in the morning. They were being held in commemoration of Augustus' military campaign in the east, near the emperor's palace on an improvised stage, for only the most illustrious citizens, senators, and nobility. Caligula arrived under the escort of his Germanic guards.

When the emperor had come in, the guardsmen closed every entranceway and assembled in a line. He waved to them graciously. Some of them he had picked up along the banks of the Rhine, during his campaigns in Germania, but

as he had not captured enough prisoners of war he had also conscripted Romans among them, requiring them to dye their hair blond and learn and speak German.

Garbed in a long, yellow robe with a green wreath of laurels on his head, the emperor took his place in front of the altar. As he performed the sacrifice, the blood of the flamingo splattered on him and a red stain spread on the lower folds of his gown. Cornelius Sabinus and Cassius exchanged glances.

9

The first day passed and then the second without the conspirators having dared to act. Callistus, once a libertine, now a wealthy citizen, churned with rage at the thought that the abomination yet lived. Caligula freely came and went among them, urging on the wrestlers and gladiators, applauding the singers and gymnasts on the pommel horse. This vexed the conspirators. They believed he was toying with them or sought to lure them into a trap.

At noon on the third day Caligula unexpectedly informed Cassius that he was going to the palace to bathe. He walked alone through the crowd, without his German guardsmen. He spoke with people as he passed. He even tugged Cornelius Sabinus' toga playfully and winked, "so, what are you waiting for?" They did not understand. He ordered the bearers of his litter to take him into the palace not by the main entrance, but rather by a narrow underground passageway at the side, where the youthful Asian aristocrats, actors in the play to be performed, were learning their parts, and as people of the East used to milder climes, had taken refuge from the cold, for there had been a strong frost that day.

10

Here he descended, conversed with his guests, the black Ethiopians and yellow Egyptians, whose lips were purple from the cold. He waited for some time. Finally he heard a gate clang shut, then the clatter of it being locked, then in the distance towards the far end of the passageway he saw the glow of several flames, and slowly, very slowly several more as they approached. At the front, like an apparition long familiar from dreams come to an assignation, Cassius.

"The password," Cassius asked formally, with soldierly rigidity.

"Jupiter," cried Caligula at the top of his voice.

"Then die in his name," screamed Cassius, plunging his sword into his chest, between his outstretched arms.

Caligula came crashing to the ground. Blood gurgled forth from his chest.

"I live," he shouted, as if in mockery or lamentation.

At this Cornelius Sabinus, Callistus, and the others fell on him. Suddenly thirty blades bathed in his blood.

Caligula still moved.

"I live," he felt once again.

But then he went miraculously pallid, and all he felt was that the world was without him, the mountains, the streams, even the stars, and he was no more. His head sank. His eyes opened, and he beheld almost ecstatically what he had always sought and now finally found: nothingness.

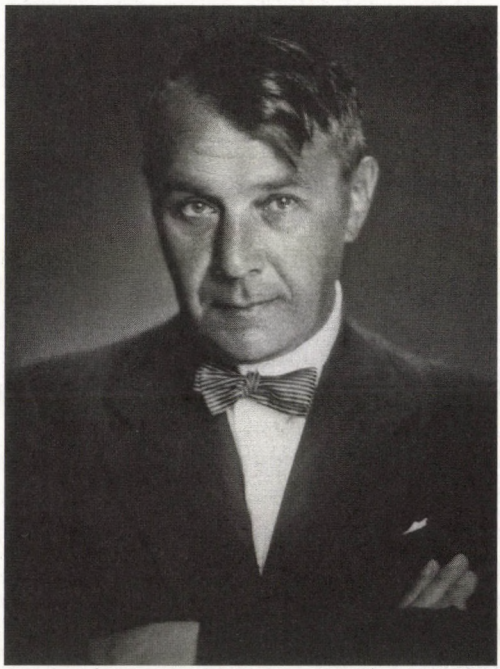
11

His face was white, bloodless, and simple. The mask of frenzy had fallen from it. Only his face remained.

A soldier stared at him for some time. He felt as if he now recognized him. He thought, to himself, "a man."

(1935)

Translated by Thomas Cooper



Dezső Kosztolányi, 1935
Photograph by László Székely (?)

Dezső Kosztolányi

Poems

Translated by George Szirtes

The sunflower like a crazy thing

(A napraforgó, mint az őrült)

The sunflower like a crazy thing
rips along by itself on the plain
in the beams of the dizzying sun,
its stringy hair coming undone.

Delirious whore—she throws
her bright skirts over her head and off she goes,
having already made out with weed
with poppy and the white vine,
she has deserted them all in order to cry
to cry alone, staring into the eye
of the terrible sun, her high-class lover
who is hot-drunk and sizzles like copper,
before galloping off like a mad thing again
in the wake of a passing high-speed train.

(1910)

October Landscape

(Októberi táj)

Scarlet leaves bloody the wine-shoots.
Fevered confessions in the yellow silence.
Words. Blazing words. Cries. Shouts.

(1935)

Song of Nothing

(Ének a semmiről)

Whatever is mine now, then I'll let go,
whatever I know now, I'll no longer know,
the face in my hands I never will show,
I'll lay myself out in the powerful flow
of deeply charged darkness, of Nothing and No.

Whatever exists, the void was before,
the present is near but the void is next door,
evil it's not, since its power is more,
since Yes might decay but No you can store,
its wounds ever raw and dabbled with gore.

The garment is strange because it is new,
it lasts a few years but is quick to undo,
dripping with teardrops, with holes poking through,
and soon it is comfy and fitting and true,
indifferent, endless, with room there for you.

I seem to have worn it right from the start,
so snugly it fits you can't tell us apart,
and while I'm no worse nor better at heart,
there's no need to learn it, no need to be smart:
to lie down and vanish takes minimal art.

Afraid? Write a note to the slough of despond,
knock at a grave and see who'll respond,
discover their stillness, their strong silent bond,
no answer's the answer that side of the pond,
we can bear it if they can, where they lie, beyond.

So sing, brother, sing, and repeat after me,
what did we lose by not having to be
with those who have trudged the dust of the sea?
did our hearts ever break, were those hearts ever free
when Caesar or Boney played fiddle-dee-dee?

(1935)

Dezső Kosztolányi

On Myself

1

Sincerity is the most beautiful form of giving thanks, so I will seek to be sincere. I give confession of what I am. I strive to be as sincere as a man can be. I can only rarely allow myself this direct sincerity, because the other sincerity, mediated, artistic sincerity, which, though cloaked in disguise, is nonetheless the more genuine, has for the most part sufficed. Thus I have hardly had any need for the former.

2

Now I do need it in order to pay my respects to those who have paid their respects to me. I am not afraid of perhaps disappointing them with my sincerity and thereby doing myself harm. If a reader imagines that a poet suffers from fitful sleeplessness and the poet lets it be known that the moment he lays down his head he sleeps like a log the reader may take offence. In my experience the reader will never forgive the poet for having ruined the romantically false picture that the reader has laboriously painted of him, and sooner or later he will have his revenge. Alas, all the admissions I have to make run counter to fashion, the so-called spirit of the age, and for the most part are unpopular.

3

First, I confess that I am happy. I am happy to write and to be able to write. I always sought and found happiness in this, clearly because I never found it anywhere else. And I am content. I am content not with my work as a writer, but rather that I work as a writer. Even today I am not surfeited with the mysterious splendour of expression. This confession may seem modest in the eyes of many, but this is not modesty. Unquestionably dilettantes cherish the same passion for their callings. I, however, have more in common with them than I do with the craftsmen who refuse to admit that this is all that matters to them and act a different part to give their penmen ambitions the luminous glaze of ideals and conceal the single, smarting spot where they may yet be wounded. Someone who reveals his weak spot as openly as I do is perhaps not entirely weak.

4

I confess, secondly, that I do not underrate reason as much as those who find and marvel at inspiration and depth in nonsense. I do not overestimate reason. While composing I see precious little use in it. It can't even help me select a rhyme, since all rhymes are without reason, nor can it offer me any assistance in giving the hero of my novel a name, since again only instinct can guide this choice. But nonetheless, reason is good for something. Through it I can form an idea of the world and of people. The judgment of reason allows me to know what is worth writing about and what is not, and where the borderlands of poetry begin. The borderlands of poetry begin where reason has become powerless. Poetry is not at all the work of reason. But someone wanting in reason stumbles frequently and needlessly, because poetry is nonetheless founded on the judgment of reason. I do not think a witless dunderhead could sing so much as a single tone. I gladly confess that I do not disdain the learning for which I am often praised, a compliment often paid as an act of charity. I usually accept it with a smile. Out of politeness I do not protest. I confess, however, that it is not entirely due. My learning is imperfect and uneven. I wrote a novel about Nero knowing nothing about the age in which he lived. Only afterwards did I gnaw my way through Tacitus, Suetonius, and Friedländer in order to conceal my ignorance, thus acquiring my historical "learning". The mysterious solitude of animals and plants excited me and a few similarities sprung to my mind. I wanted to know whether the similarities would withstand scrutiny, so I began to study zoology and botany, thus acquiring my "learning" in the natural sciences. Once I was criticized for the structure of some of my sentences and I had to explain myself. As soon as I began to research the question I came across increasingly valuable materials and increasingly lost myself in the sweetness of linguistics. Thus I acquired my linguistic "learning." When I was young they entrusted me with the translation of Caldéron's *La señora y la criada,* a verse play. I accepted the task, but at the time I spoke not a word of Spanish. I would have been ashamed to produce a second-hand interpretation, so I strove post-haste to remedy my inadequacy. Thus I learned Spanish. My restless curiosity fluttered hither and thither, and indeed roamed many lands in search of adventure. This does not mean that I deny my "learning." I leave that—as solace, as weapon—to those who do not like me.

5

I confess, thirdly, that I believe in poetry for the sake of poetry, that a poem has no purpose, cannot have any other purpose, than to be beautiful. When I first came on the scene I expressed this conviction. At the time I was in the opposition. A faction of would-be patriots sounding jingoistic catchphrases demanded that I clarify my stance. I replied that I am Hungarian, that I write in Hungarian, and that I can make no greater confession of love for my people. I was not willing to ask for a "cerificate of moral character" to append to my poems. For a time my principles prevailed. Now

I am again in the opposition. Another faction, just as impatient but far greater in number, demands that anyone who takes pen in hand serve and swear allegiance to the case of humanity, a case which for the moment remains exceedingly vague and unexplained. I replied that I myself am human, I write in a human language, and naturally I feel sympathy and compassion for my fellow humans. I am not willing, however, to append a medical certificate to my poems confirming that I do indeed suffer on their behalf, that what causes them pain causes me pain as well, that I bleed if stabbed, or if one of them is stabbed, that artistic creation always springs from human torments. I consider this a strictly private affair. The work itself is public. Should a poet become the spokesman of a cause, he stoops to the level of a servant, no matter what these interests may be or how momentous they seem. A servant in the employment of a big enterprise is no less a lackey than a servant in the employment of a small enterprise. I am aware that *l'art pour l'art* has something of a bad press today all over the world. I am aware that aesthetics—*aesthesis*, which originally meant perception, sensual and sensitive observation—has become a term of ridicule in this wonderfully blinded and wonderfully base century, which sees in it its own despised mindlessness and soullessness, and the aesthete, who has always been the sensual and sensitive creator, has also become a term of scorn, a title for a half-witted, pernickety milksop. I am aware that aimless contemplation of the world and human affairs is considered mere play with words by the slick frauds of action and the customs officers of fame, as if play with words were anything less than play with life itself and words were not lions that have torn giants to pieces. I have no reason to repudiate my beliefs in these cruel times. The ivory tower remains a cleaner, more human place than a party headquarters.

6

I confess, finally, that these are my morals as well. I have no other morals. I will make use of the ideas and the terms of the French philosopher Jules de Gaultier, who distinguished two types of people, homo moralis and homo aestheticus. These two men have been in conflict with each other throughout history. Homo moralis is austere. Homo moralis is merciless with himself and with others. Homo moralis is demanding, one-sided, and limited. Homo moralis incessantly contradicts himself. In the name of morality, homo moralis wants to induce us to give our overcoat to someone else, but then he presses us, again in the name of morality, to strip others of their overcoats. Homo moralis wages wars, stages revolutions, sets funeral pyres ablaze, sends people to the gallows, coerces millions into mortification of the flesh and millions more into brute labour with the promise of a better future, a promise which has yet to be kept. Deluding both himself and others, homo moralis always promises perfect happiness, but always at some distant point in time, in the next world if we have perished, in victory if we have defeated our enemies in war, or five or five-thousand years hence when the economic situation will finally have stabilized. Homo moralis

holds out the promise of heaven and transforms the world into a vale of tears. Homo moralis is discontent with everything. He would polish a ray of sunshine, yet he has no time to take pleasure in its beauty. Homo moralis has never suggested that we rest a bit, live, or catch our breath. Homo moralis simply runs and cannot stop. His antithesis is not homo immoralis. In the life and death struggle of existence it is impossible to determine who is moral and who is immoral. This will be decided only later, when one side has won, and the decision is contingent. The antithesis and negative of homo moralis, his fundamental repudiation, is homo aestheticus, the man of pure perception for its own sake, who knows neither good nor bad, which no man of genius can distinguish, but only beautiful and unsightly, which his individual impulses sense with certainty, the man who, in lieu of justice, which is always open to dispute, has elevated taste, a more reliable and more compassionate guide, to the mantelpiece, the man who stands neither on the right, among the bleating white lambs, nor on the left, among the howling black wolves, but rather alone, far from flock and drove, always alone, like one indifferent to or understanding all, a natural friend or enemy to all, one who can loathe or love everyone separately according to his or her merits, who acts on a case by case basis, who condemns violence because it is unsightly, who would never suffer the tastelessness of an elderly woman being struck in the face, whether she be a red washerwoman or a white countess, who is not a member of any party, one without tempers, who throughout his life clings with steely temperament to his lack of tempers, the man spineless but noble and glorious because he accepts his spinelessness with unwavering resolve in order to ensure his own freedom, independence, and whimsy and remain a man content in his discontentedness because he understands why he is discontent, a man who sometimes fancies perfect the imperfect world, who saved himself first and foremost from the saviours, who awaits nothing and receives everything in a single moment of wonderment, who entreats this moment, and with it life itself, to linger.

7

It would not be my nature to drum up devotees to the cause of the homo aestheticus, nor do I wish to estrange the followers of the homo moralis from their guide. I merely submit that I find the first a spirit of beauty, the second a spirit of ugliness. I would not want anyone to consider it bravery on my part to have championed the cause of homo aestheticus, who nowadays is generally loathed and despised. I would have to disclaim this assessment, as moral judgment and anything moral are entirely foreign to my being, indeed I hold them in contempt. Nor would it have been cowardice on my part had I not confessed everything that I have professed with every line I have written to this day. It would have been unsightly. I have confessed as I had to confess. *Homo aestheticus sum.* ❧

(1933) *Translated by Thomas Cooper*

Dezső Kosztolányi

To Be or Not To Be

Dear Fellow Writers,*

One day in early spring István Széchenyi summoned his friends to his mansion at five o'clock in the afternoon. This date was March 12th, 1848, just before the outbreak of the revolution.

He sent the following entreaty:

"As our homeland and in particular our nation may easily come to harm, and we find ourselves faced with a situation in which our people must choose either to enter a glorious new era or be ensnared in great perils, I call on those whose names are listed below in particular (as I would gladly welcome anyone) to be so kind as to honour me with their presence in my home for a friendly gathering to take counsel of one another. István Széchenyi."

Behind the page bearing the summons one finds the long list of those he had invited, the names of some seventy public figures, Kossuth among them.

His guests arrived, one after the other. Széchenyi's servants, one from Vienna, the other a bearded old Bohemian, helped the gentlemen descend from their coaches and led them into the drawing room.

Five o'clock came and went, then quarter-past, then half-past. The master of the house failed to appear. The guests grew impatient, not because of their host's discourtesy so much as his disregard. They stood up and prepared to leave. Then, at around a quarter to, István Széchenyi appeared between the wings of the open door.

He was agitated and pale. His dark brown skin had visibly sallowed. He was deathly pale.

He shook hands with no one. He stopped, still near the door, which his

* ■ Text of an address delivered on 2 February 1930 at the General Meeting of the Hungarian Writers' Society.

servants in the meantime had closed. His gaze darted across the faces of those present.

The first thing he noted was that Kossuth had not come. Naturally, naturally. For weeks he had been receiving letters from all corners, from county seats, from "the Hungarian sons of the Transylvanian homeland," advising him of the plans and schemes of the impassionate leader of the people. He had not expected him to come. But he was nonetheless outraged that he had not.

In that fateful hour some twenty of the seventy people invited had shown up. Count György Andrássy, Count János Cziráky, Count György Károlyi, Count Károly Keglevich, Bishop József Lonovics, Judge György Majláth, Antal Majtényi, Count Móric Pálffy, Baron Zsigmond Perényi, Count József Szapáry, Count Antal Széchenyi, József Ürményi were present, and others. The revolutionary currents of the moment had borne Transylvanian magnate Baron Miklós Wesselényi from his home in Zsibó to Széchenyi's door. And at the side stood his two step-sons, Félix and Henrik Zichy.

The failure of the other fifty to show up disheartened him. If a moment earlier his blood had been aflame because of Kossuth's failure to appear, their apathy chilled him. In his left hand he wearily held the leaf of paper on which he had written the watchwords of his speech. The paper trembled in his fingers.

He looked down at the floor, rigid, as he did when preparing to speak.

"Forgive me, gentlemen," he began, "that I have kept you waiting. It was not any official business that delayed me, no. Something entirely different. Something of less matter, something of more matter. Before I stepped into this room I was brooding in my study. A terrible storm raged in my breast," and here he fell silent, hooking his fingers into the tails of his buttoned-up coat as was his wont. "Slowly it gathered strength, doubt upon doubt, cloud upon cloud, but now it has burst. And I have come to a decision." Again he paused. "For years I have wondered whether it is worth continuing our constructive labours. In the beginning one or two flickering rays of hope still glimmered. The horizon has since grown thick with clouds. You are all familiar with the political situation. It would be superfluous to expound the details. We dream and speak of blood, all of us. Here we stand at the centre of Europe, the disgrace of the continent. Our nation is lazy, boorish, haughty, insensate to justice, negligent of duty, and hardly susceptible to refinement. Perhaps in the east, in its fertile native soil, it could have flourished, but transplanted westward it has degenerated, shrivelled, and grown feeble with years. In vain we graft the nobler branch of cultivation onto a mouldering trunk. If it becomes western it loses is original distinctiveness and personality and is transformed into something foreign. If we neglect it, it dries out, withers, becoming neither Western nor Eastern, nor Hungarian. What is the point of being Hungarian anyway?" he asked, raising his head impudently, almost provocatively. "What is the good of speaking a language that is not understood

a mere stone's throw from here? What is the point of a little people, barely a handful's worth, clinging obsessively to the madness of their ancestors? No gentlemen," he said, slapping his dishevelled hair to his forehead, "no gentleman," he said again, raising his voice, almost yelling, "there is no point whatsoever. No point in shutting ourselves off from the community of cultured nations. No point in playing the ardent nationalist here, on this minute little point of the globe. No point in passing on our language to our sons and their sons like some kind of congenital disease. Then we must forget it," he spoke with mounting vehemence, "we must melt in among the German speakers, melt into the Empire. Let the expansion of the hereditary provinces and the final and utter demise of our nationality and language be a blessing and act of kindness upon us and the whole of humanity. Only the first generation will suffer any pain. The next will bless our memory. The Hungarian must cease to be, he must abandon his thoughts of revolution and his petulance. For our part, we have but one duty: to allow the events of implacable world history to take their course. There is no other path. Certain annihilation awaits us. We can choose between two kinds of death: one is painful, the other painless. Believe me, only after enduring grave conflicts of conscience and long days and nights did I choose the latter for my hapless people. At least they will not suffer a guilty conscience for the sin of their degeneration, they will not sense that pall and coffin soon await. It is therefore my firm and unwavering decision to cease my work once and forever. Dust soon will cover it. I am pained only to have awoken those who slept. But they will fall asleep again," he gave a wave of his hand and began to speak more rapidly, almost jabbering. "I have informed Prince Metternich of my intentions. He suggested an amicable peace. He promised a painless death. As for how you mean to act, that depends entirely on you. I am very sorry to have troubled you to come here. I merely wished to inform you of this. I have nothing else to say."

He took another step back towards the door so that the space in the enormous hall separating him and his guests would widen. The orator fell silent. He stood alone, far from the others, isolated in his sombreness and his black garb, like Shakespeare's melancholy Prince of Denmark. He stared at a single point, like a man deranged. He trembled with agitation. His audience also trembled. They had stood in silence and listened to him from start to finish, without interrupting or offering even the tiniest hiss in protest. The silence now grew. It was the stillness of a burial. They stood shocked, their feet rooted to the ground. The gentlemen held a muffled exchange of views, casting wary glances at their host, who was still brooding, immersed in himself. Some timorously expressed their approval of the basic idea, objecting only to the manner of execution. Again they fell silent. It was a long silence.

"Scoundrel," someone cried, then again, "you scoundrel," pointing at Széchenyi, "you're a scoundrel."

Who was it? Miklós Wesselényi. He slammed his tremendous fist down on a little baroque table so hard that it cracked. He leapt to his feet and began to run, but he knocked over a chair. He was blind. He groped and stumbled his way forward, his eyes long extinguished, through the never ending night of sightlessness, struggling towards the spot where he surmised Széchenyi must be standing, to attack him. The others grabbed him and tried to calm him.

"Scoundrel," he gasped in his rage, "scoundrel."

"Traitor," screeched a thin voice. "Son of Count Ferenc Széchényi, who founded the National Museum?"

"It's a perfect disgrace," the patriotic magnates lamented indignantly. "I can't fathom this."

"Ist der Stefi verrückt geworden?"

"C'est trés fort."

"Mais il est fou."

They spluttered and raved, to Széchenyi, to one another, to the air, and to themselves.

"He has renounced his *principia*."

"All in vain, for he was born in Vienna, as a lieutenant he couldn't even speak Hungarian, he learnt it from books."

"The German in him is creeping out."

"To this day Countess Crescenz cannot speak Hungarian."

"You want to deliver a nation to the court, you fink?" the childhood friend with whom he had travelled to France and England shouted again. "I can only assume you have lost your mind. Or was it all a hoax? Was it not you who wrote that every drop of your blood bears the veneration of the nation? Now you are rousing the nation to give up its rights, its independence, now you are handing it over to the forces of reaction. Where is your place after all this, you who sought to put the ashes of our great ancestors into the national pantheon? No, no, this little people is not lazy, only neglected, not aged, rather a child still in need of assistance and protection. The people of the East must fight both for the East and against it, for the West and against it, then it can attain the stars. We will continue to labour on its behalf, to follow the path ordained for us, without you, even against you. We will never abandon our righteous plans for reform, however. We are of the conviction—you wrote this too—that someone who plants a few fruit trees in his life will rest more peacefully in the soil. So help us God."

"To the gallows and the firing squad," someone said quietly, as if to himself: Count Lajos Batthyány.

The gathering murmured and rumbled for minutes on end, first with approval, then outrage, then objective, impartial debate, then glinting hatred, glowering defiantly at the man standing by the door, obstinate, smiling haughtily on principles, shrugging his shoulders, imperturbable. His eyes glowed beneath his

bushy brows like the burning bush. A hail of invectives and curses pattered on his bony, yellow pate. He heard an unceasing stream of his one-time words from men at whose sides he had fought for decades. They took aim at him, the words of his books *Credit, Light,* and *The State of Affairs* their weapons.

"Untiring zeal, patience, steadfastness," Wesselényi flared in the throes of oration. "Do you not shudder at the thought that I, the poor blind man who lost his sight in the prison of Buda, see the path, while you, you, who once lit a light for us in the darkness, no longer do?"

Széchenyi's lips quivered. They thought he was going to burst into tears. But he didn't. Nonchalantly, like a man of the world, he walked to the centre of the room and burst out laughing. He laughed for some time. Then he announced that the whole thing had been a charade. He had wanted to test them. He had acted out a carefully devised comedy, drawing his friends in as well, and had arrived at the conclusion that in the company of so many noble patriots it was worth continuing the work with renewed vigour. His face lit up with joy. He had his footmen bring in the candelabra, as night had fallen, and behind the closed doors the discussion, the very serious "friendly gathering to take counsel," began in earnest, stretching into the late hours of the night.

The details of this story are recorded in a spy report held in an archive in Vienna for undisclosed documents. The report was submitted to the camarilla that very day, March 12th, under the registry number 3652–3653, but because of the tumultuous international political events of the moment it did not arrive in the hands of the young Austrian emperor Ferdinand until March 27th. I have seen the invitation with my own eyes, on it Széchenyi's signature, and a mouldy, crumbling sheet of paper bearing the draft of his speech, written in pencil.

Why did I tell all this in such detail? Because I myself could say nothing more concise, jarring, or dramatic. No such drama has ever been performed on stage either. But it has been played out on the stage of history. Not played out so much as lived through. Both sides lived through it, both those who were hoodwinked and the jester himself. Whether the jester was really a jester or not I cannot presume to decide, and I have not therefore pried into the question. If he was not a jester, then his conviction that it was worth believing and creating, even when beset by doubts, is all the more worthy of respect. If he was a trickster and was merely acting, the experience was no less revealing. Every joke is an organic part of our thinking, a splinter shaved off our notions and sentiments. Every game is an abortive act. Whatever it may have been, the scene is as profound and as moving as Hamlet's soliloquy, "To be or not to be." It was not acted out in the name of a single man, but rather in the name of millions upon millions. The speaker dramatized his own doubts. It is not a soliloquy so much as a wondrous polyphonic melody with rich, capricious, tragic orchestration. It is the Hungarian "To be or not to be."

My friends, I have often thought about Széchenyi's troubling jest. I believe all of us who take plume in hand must constantly address the question of being and not being. We awaken to it in the morning, lie down with it at night, and think of it many times each day. Simply because it is our craft. When the Hungarian Writers' Society honoured me with an invitation to say a few words here, on the occasion of its first general meeting, an idea flashed through my mind: to appear in disguise and from beneath the mask of despair and ridicule to whisper the following impish words into the ear of an imagined fellow writer:

"Tell me, and be honest, what is it that you are seeking, you poet, writer, artist, in the twentieth century, and moreover what are you seeking here, among us? I cannot help but chuckle when I look at you. You are the son of a poor, indebted, people of plough and field, the child of a nation spat upon and humbled, another unwanted mouth to feed in a starving country maimed until only a few counties remained. A man who shuns scythe and hoe, a laughable anachronism, a vestigial organ. In the best case scenario you are a luxury article. You are the gilded plaster rose, the first thing to fall clattering from the gable when they demolished our old, beloved homestead. I have no idea why you are still dawdling here in this world. I can assure you that no one reads you. Neither your scribblings, nor anyone else's. They do not like you. But they don't really hate you either. They are indifferent to you. If you do not believe me pop into a few of the distinguished bookstores. Observe how loyally the Hungarian books huddle together on the shelf, how they are pushed aside with a haughty smile by those still able to purchase paper cluttered with letters. Things foreign are all the rage now, friend, everything *di moda, à la page, tief und gedankenvoll.* Sometimes the social clubs fete a writer in the salons. Most of them are foreign too. They are besieged at the train terminal and interrogated as to their opinions, then dragged in a triumphal march to the banquets. We have dozens of writers more interesting than they, but the public is simply not curious to know anything about them. And with good reason. First, because they do not own dinner jackets and it would be unthinkable to put their patched trousers and emaciated faces in the spotlight, and second because readers have been progressively weaned from the habit of taking an interest in them. Much of our press—with all due respect to the exceptions—is left cold by things of "eternal value." Whatever is of "eternal value" is quite pointless by now. Elsewhere things are hardly rosy these days. Yet still one notes with surprise that the French newspapers devote pages to literature, and each has a regular critic with a keen personality and unlimited purview. The Italian press considers it a question of honour, which is to say obligation, that the *terza pagina* contains exclusively articles on books and ideas, much as the Spanish press reserves the *segunda página* for literature. In Hungary there is no real place for this. Writers are squeezed out by those more interesting, the house-painters and house-servants turned movie stars and murderous rapists

abroad. We have no works of criticism. From time to time a laudatory book review is published. Readers seasoned and blithe turn the page with a smile, because they imagine the edifying scene when the writer managed, begging on his knees, to secure it. Sadly, this is often the case. Sometimes a disparaging invective is published. This too everyone flips past, because we can guess the motives behind it. And again, most of the time we hit the nail on the head. It is thanks to this absence of criticism that independent opinion is received with suspicion and protest from the outset. An independent word is unfamiliar, and readers cannot imagine that someone may hold a different opinion without any political or financial motive. A rebel sometimes pops up. From time to time he vents his bile, cuts someone down, perhaps unjustly. This is not excusable, but it is understandable. Slaves can only revolt, they cannot fight. We have no literary commandos, only literary terrorists who, considering the intellectual and cultural squalor in which they live, prefer to stab the capitalists of the mind, the kings of culture. In the absence of criticism the form of government of literature resembles that of the ancient régime: tyranny mitigated by regicide. We live under the reign of terror of murderous factions. Freedom of thought has been tossed to the dogs. No one dares let slip a yelp. This censorship, practiced with the common consent of all parties (which support, nourish, and strengthen one another with their lack of cultivation, their petulance, and their shared punitive expeditions), is more dreadful than any official, undisguised censorship. The common concern of literature falls victim to it. You do not realize that you are thinning while those who have scrambled to the public square grow pleasantly plump at the expense of all writers, chuckling together in secret, like the augurs. Let us suppose, however, that they do not kill you outright. You are still not allowed to write your views, because you have no power. You have no strength to take the initiative. It is hardly a wonder that the writer is usually a figure of scorn and disdain, intellectually debased, physically deformed. A writer friend of mine sent me a letter asking for thirty fillérs for a tram fare. Another sucks at the teat of the society for the protection of infants. Twice a day they give him free milk, and with good reason, for this is his lunch and dinner. But it may come to pass that you "make it," as so many have. Then, for the novel on which you worked for one or two years, you will certainly receive enough to live on for a month or two without the slightest care, and for the short story on which you worked your fingers to the bone for over a week you will receive more than enough to cover the cost of the coffees you drank and the cigarettes you smoked while writing. And so you take another job. You work from dawn till dusk so that the writer in you can work from dusk till dawn. It is not true that there are no longer patrons of the arts among us. Our writers are the patrons of the arts. They are their own patrons. In the operetta era following the war, the paradise of dilettantes and semi-scholars, this is how true poets and artists cheat the

present age. As for posterity, don't hold out even the slightest hope, my friend. I know posterity. We ourselves are posterity, the posterity of the recent past. Tell me, where are the books on the great artists with whom we walked arm in arm, István Petelei, Károly Lovik, József Kiss, Viktor Cholnoky? And when did their impassioned devotees last celebrate Sándor Bródy, Géza Csáth, Gyula Török, Margit Kaffka, or Árpád Tóth, just to mention a few? In other lands, where literature continues to thrive, they still pay due respect to the dead, injecting them into the electric current of life. Every decade they are assessed and reassessed, elevated or repudiated. In other words they are discussed. Here there is no resurrection. The Hungarian dead are buried deep. Their immortality generally lasts as long as they can still ring their publishers or friends. As soon as they are no longer able to place a call, they are in trouble. They are no longer "divine sons" pressed close to the bosoms of rapturous Hungarian maidens and youths. Nor are they the writer-nabobs of rich nations, who travel by airplane and vacation in summer villas by the seaside. The spirit of the age has become base. National seclusion has vanished from the globe, replaced by the warmth of a huddling mass of peoples and a cold internationality. One rarely comes across distinctive folk costumes anymore. Barely half a century ago there were Hungarian villages that in winter were entirely isolated by the snow. Until spring arrived they had no contact with even the nearest villages. In the manor houses of the nobility and in peasant huts people would tell tales or read by candlelight while spinning or stripping the fowl of their down and feathers. This familiar intimacy, the fertile silence of reverie, in which both poet and reader mature, is forever a thing of the past. As a result of the forward march of engineering and the triumphant breakthroughs in transportation the world has become one. It is not irrelevant that today one can fly to New York in barely three days. One should also not forget that it was not until 1840 that the first rudimentary train chugged down the tracks in Hungary, we were not able to make phone calls until 1880, and this technological revolution, which is buffeting national literature towards unknown and unforeseeable crises, is still in its earliest stages and will only later make its true influence felt. For the moment even the women of the farmsteads refer to lipstick as *rúzs,* the phonetic Hungarian spelling of the French *rouge*. All manners of literatures have been slung about our necks, either in the original or in translation. And, what is more disconcerting, the written word has found a formidable rival in the cinema, which makes almost exclusive use of merchandise foreign to us and every day draws enormous crowds away from the book. It has taught people to feel and think in images, without expressing themselves in language, without delighting in the wonder of linguistic expression. In any event it causes the word to atrophy. Office clerks can learn from the various language lessons on the radio and perfect their pronunciations watching talkies. A new era has arrived: the jazzband age

of internationalism. The glittering star of language is on the wane. It would be foolhardy to assume that you will be able to cook up even a single book for this audience. You can perhaps contend with this or that absurdity, but in doing so you merely treat the symptoms. You cannot race against an airplane, an airship, a high-speed train, you cannot rattle and clatter as furiously and omnipresently as the film, and you cannot out-clamour the radio, the never-silent maw, which bellows in ten languages at once, from every longitude and latitude. It is as heroic to take up arms against the undefeatable as it is foolish. So what is the point of being a Hungarian writer? There is no point, my friend, none. I advise you to break your fountain pen in half, cast the pieces to the bottom of the Danube, and quickly seek a better livelihood. If however you lack the resolve to do this, then grab your pistol, bite down on the end of the barrel to be sure you hit the mark, and pull the trigger. Eliminate yourself now, quickly, before others do, slowly. Let no trace remain of the scribbler's accursed breed. Let the literature once so illustrious perish now, at the beginning of the twentieth century, let it die out once and for all, the literature that began so appropriately with the *Funeral oration*."

How patient the writer to whom I address this philippic! For he has yet to cry out and cause a scandal by chasing me from the hall. I know he is not here, and indeed I know there is no such writer, for he is merely a creature of my fancy. But even if there is no such writer, he should nonetheless emerge now from the void, like a living contradiction, to silence me by soldering these blasphemous words to my throat. I already hear his voice, the resounding voice that gushes from me and from all those present.

– Enough, enough. Nothing but lies, motley, flamboyant lies, and what little truth they may contain has been perfidiously and insolently twisted. The man who contrived this speech has upbraided us for the common human mediocrity found in the better part of the literature of every country. We have learned from experience that those who chide our people are often lecturing all of humanity and criticizing nature itself. Like the others, he has made uninformed generalizations. His error lies not in the fact that there is not a grain of truth in his reproaches. His error is greater. His error lies in the fact that there is not a tatter of love in them either. There are two kinds of people. One says, when he has let his gaze wander and stubbed his toe against a stone in the sidewalk, "oh how clumsy I am!" He rubs his smarting foot and resolves to pay better attention next time. The other, having in his absent-mindedness knocked his foot against the same stone, says, "That's Hungary for you!" Then immediately he conceives a plan to build the sidewalks of the future not flat, but concave. Our speaker, for whom we cherish little respect, belongs to the latter type. He has aired his complaints, in which there is much that is moving. He has reproached us with references to a few foreign examples that may be worthy of imitation. I, however, will show the other side of the matter. The French lament that their critiques of

books are increasingly Americanized. In more than one forum favourable reviews are openly purchased by authors. In more than one forum they are governed by the camaraderie of circles of friends, the chapel that becomes the *chapelle ardente* of talent. In Italy, a country of some forty-two million inhabitants, the first encyclopedia is only now being published, while we have more dog-eared editions than I can count. Ninety per cent of popular literature in England is such drivel that it would make our readers vomit with revulsion. In Germany noted writers also work as insurance agents and claims adjustors. I have heard that *The Dial,* one of the most prominent literary journals in America, has a grand total of some eight-hundred subscribers, which is hardly impressive if we consider that the population of the United States is one-hundred-and-two million and some of the subscribers are European, me among others. Most importantly, our speaker has forgotten how we tower above the peoples of the region in our refinement. They are only now primping and embellishing their languages and calling desperately for their own Kazinczy. I do not know another nation of twelve million that has cast a lyrical star into orbit in the skies above us of the brilliance of Petőfi, a world-conquering storyteller like Jókai, an artist like Arany, who transfigured every clod and clump of our language, and what nation has had so many writers of the magnitude of Vörösmarty, Berzsenyi, Madách or Mikszáth? The surging waves of global tides never broke against our cliffs or stagnated in our lowlands. Shakespeare has been among us now for several generations as a living, national writer, and Dostoevsky, who the French are only now beginning to discover, was read by our fathers, as were Ibsen and Tolstoy. We are living in hard times, this is undeniable. The main body of our readership has been torn from us. Though they live next door, we now have to put as many stamps on a letter to them as we would on a letter to Australia. They often do not receive our books, even if we put twice as many stamps on them. But we do not take fright at the thought that the world is now one, that every literature is a part of world literature, that given the possibility of comparison the only standard that remains is the standard of world literature. Anyone who fears to take part in this competition and urges us instead to set up protective barriers is simply pusillanimous. Let us rid ourselves of all that is provincial, slovenly, mediocre. Thought and sentiment that are worth more to us than to the world should be left to wither in the bud. Europe is not foreign to us. Sometimes our hearts pine for memories of Asia, which we can only guess, but not know, and we imagine that if the treasures of the runic script, the bewitching words of the shaman, and the songs of the pagan heralds of spring garbed in sheets of bark are not lost and we are allowed to evolve in the cradle of culture, within the natural, old framework, then a literature can flower among us as distinctive, as unique as Japanese or Chinese. But this is a mirage. Our great poets and writers have since fatefully betrothed us to the European mind. We are Europeans, writers of Europe and the world. The only thing we can lament today is that we are more

distant from Europe than our ancestors, and we are therefore more distant from our own Hungarianness as well. This may seem a contradiction, but it is not. The pioneering generation of which I just spoke stood closer to the European mind and therefore the Hungarian mind as well. A writer can have no other ambition than to win the favour of the entire world. Literature is something unusually broad, enfolding everyone in its embrace. This greatness is the only thing worth seeking. We must conquer the West, not for ourselves, but rather for our people, for the East. We too move like the swing of the pendulum, between East and West, never resting. This nomadic restlessness, this ancient, mysterious duality is the profound essence of our heritage and our mentality. Our conquest, however, can only be internal. We must compete with the great minds of the world at home. Those more illustrious or more fortunate, whose books may sell in markets abroad as well, should not delude themselves into thinking that they will be able knock down the bronze gates of fame with clubs. They will always remain oddities abroad, guests either welcomed or suffered. Nor is it important what befalls them abroad. What matters is what happens here. Even if the hand of a master has transplanted his poems into a foreign idiom, the rhymes will clink more languidly, his dialogues will stumble, half his allusions will be missed. Our witch's craft is a craft of form and nuance. We all draw sustenance from faltering memories, visions, hallucinations that stretch far into the past, a hallucination caused by a word that echoes mysteriously in the cavern of centuries. I regret that I cannot say something more original, but a literature can only breath with the soul of a language. The old truths are fraying, but they nonetheless remain truths. Pascal wrote, *"Le silence éternel des espaces infinis m'effraie."* Since Voltaire generation after generation has marvelled at the musicality of this sentence and has concurred that it is the most beautiful phrase in French. We must accept this as true, that this must be the case. Even if I had a lifetime to do so, in vain would I attempt to explain to them why the line *"elhull a virág, eliramlik az élet"*—the flower petals fall, life flits past—is so beautiful. For us it is enough to hear it. We look at one another and understand everything. In our eyes a familial spark gleams. Poetry is not just something broad, enfolding everyone in its embrace as I said before, but something closed as well, something familial. Every great poem is familial. The family members recount anecdotes of a small child whom we all knew long ago, anecdotes meaningless and incomprehensible to the stranger. They recall something that the stranger cannot recall and they smile. Poetry is similar. It lives in the spirit of our language, in which we are all fused together, whatever our political beliefs may be. We do not boast that we are faithful to this language. We are that fidelity ourselves. Nor do we claim that we breathe exclusively with, through, and for it. We are the language ourselves. Blood is not always thicker than wine, it can even turn on its own, but the community of a common language is immovable and indestructible. We usually do not notice this. We remain unaware of it, just as the wild tree in

the forest remains unaware that it is the wild tree in the forest. Sometimes we nevertheless must put this in words in order to strengthen our sense of responsibility and self-awareness. For a time we will perhaps have to make ten times as many sacrifices as before. But can someone who finds the price of the sacrifice too dear call himself a writer? We no longer have to fear for the tool of our trade, which the pioneers salvaged from harsher times and passed on to us. Our work is hard, but also enviable. Work is our passion. Guiseppe Rensi, the philosopher of Genoa, wrote somewhere that the poet is the happiest of men, for he spends his life playing with what he finds interesting. He can be compared to a smoker who is paid to smoke. The remuneration of our craft is more than any wage. We can multiply our lives in time and space. If we each should find only ten readers, ten genuine, devoted readers who sometimes think of us, independent of our physical being, then we have no cause for complaint. These readers exist, somewhere hidden from us, perhaps they are young, perhaps old, perhaps poor. Their love is not clamorous, and you will not see their names on any "list of those in attendance." Perhaps in Hungary fame is more pallid than elsewhere. Perhaps immortality is more concealed, but it is no less enduring. The other day a fourteen-year-old boy lay abed with a fever of forty degrees. In the evening, when I tucked him in, he was delirious. He said one word in his feverish dream: "Gárdonyi." I did not know that he read and loved Gárdonyi. I learned this then, and in the silence of the sickroom I learned what the immortality of the Hungarian writer means. In the middle of the night a feverish schoolboy in Budapest spoke of someone he had never seen, someone of whom he knew only his spirit. The value and power of literature does not depend on the numerical size of a nation. The nation that created the golden age of Greek literature was no larger than the population of three of our towns today, and had hardly more readers than three of our villages. We all need schooling in tragedy, as early as the children's playroom or the school desk, self-flagellation and not self-delusion, awareness of our tragedy. We need Széchenyi's tragic perspective on the world, which casts one into despair and can raise one to new heights. I am giving an answer to the question they have nailed to our breasts: to be or not to be? To be, certainly, to be. First and foremost to be human and humane, to be good Europeans and good Hungarians, a swordsman lunging both westward and eastward, an ambitious, wilful artist and a humble worker. Anyone who dreams of Rolls Royces and luxurious houses should take his leave. Anyone who seeks only to acquire the title "master," but not to be a schoolmaster to the nation, has no place here. Anyone in whom slumbers not a single glimmer of the creed or apostolic vision of those who built in Széchenyi's spirit does not belong here. The soul and language that we have inherited for a short time we must pass on to our offspring unchipped, polished with a new spirit. This is our calling, *"whether the hand of fate should bless or smite us."* This is our calling. Let us bow our heads just a little. But with hearts high, my friends, with hearts high. ❧

Miklós Vajda

Our Scots Translator

On the Death of Edwin Morgan

Edwin Morgan, one of the major Scottish poets, and an outstanding translator of Hungarian poetry into English, as such a pioneer in the field, died at the age of 90 this summer. Over four decades his, among others, was the English voice of more than two dozen Hungarian poets, in most cases first translated and in not a few, repeatedly so. He introduced Hungarian poetry to English readers of poetry, a relatively small but, seen from here, vast community. He did so in the sixties, when all that existed were translations by, for the most part, dilettantes, enthusiastic Hungarian expats. Other poets were inspired by his example to engage in this adventure full of pitfalls. When I was, for forty years, literary editor of this journal, I was able to persuade more than one established English or American poet by pointing to his example. "Seriously? Edwin Morgan has done some stuff?" They would take a look and then set to it themselves, having been convinced. That there was such a thing as poetry in Hungarian; that it could be translated and that it was worth the trouble. It detracts not a jot from Morgan's colossal merits in our eyes that he did this not just for us Hungarians but for more than a few other languages as well—Old English, Latin, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, German, Russian. He did not speak a word of Hungarian, and that was how he became a masterful interpreter of Hungarian poets, but more on that later.

Miklós Vajda

an essayist, critic and literary translator, was the literary editor of this journal (1965–1990) and its editor (1990–2005). In addition to translating a great number of works by British, American and German authors including about five dozen plays for the theatre, he selected and edited anthologies of Hungarian writing in English and British/American writing in Hungarian. An excerpt from the memoir Anyakép, amerikai keretben *(Portrait of a Mother in an American Frame, 2008) was published in* HQ, *No.191. The book was reviewed by John Batki in* HQ, *No. 198.*

On looking at his own poetic oeuvre one comes to understand how and why he fitted in so many, and so many kinds of, foreign voices. His poems show him to be a sensitive, restless, late mind, full of curiosity and also scepticism about the state of the known world, civilisation and society. A poet who is keen to get his bearings and to whom what is of primary interest is a more thorough acquaintance with poetry written in foreign languages by translating it. Who has a sense that one must break out of the self-satisfied insularity—parochialism if you like—of English-language poetry towards the poets of other climes. Even today there are still few English-language poets of comparable stature who are both willing and able to do so.

He was a poet with a wide range of themes, most often an objective poet, restrained, not inclined to speak much about himself, leaving it to the subject and the poem written about it indirectly to characterise the poet. Even on the occasions when he nevertheless wrote in the first person it was a range of different egos who spoke in his place, but it was mostly an anonymous ego, a circumspect, receptive, remembering, commenting and rational I who spoke in the poem. This inclination to switch the poetic point of view helps the translator. Morgan makes use of sharply focused, hard-toned, sparkling metaphors; he does not go into details, does not compare; he states, declares. When he does comment it is on an intellectual and rarely an emotional plane. What we get is not a continuous narrative line but mosaic pictures; he does not tell a story but depicts, frequently illuminating his subjects from several angles, walking round them and mapping them. He does have a subjective quality, too, though; he has also written shy, sensitive lyrical love poems. On reading these it did not cross my mind, though if I had paid more attention there may have been places, here and there, where I could have spotted earlier what transpired about him in 1990, when he outed himself and courageously declared himself to be gay.

His favoured medium was free verse kept within strictly controlled limits, but an entire volume of masterful sonnets (*Glasgow Sonnets,* 1972) demonstrated not only an offhand sureness in handling stricter forms and a flexibility of temperament and language, but also his willingness to accommodate, which is a particularly important quality in a translator seeing that the form in which a foreign poem is received is ready-made and not open to choice.

Someone mentioned in an online obituary that he was the first *Scots Makar,* the Scots term for national poet or bard. The relationship that Scots, Irish and Welsh poets and writers have towards English, their native language, is puzzling in the extreme. They esteem their respective ancient Celtic tongues but, with few exceptions, do not speak them. For want of better, they write in the language of their one-time enemies, suppressors and occupiers, and meanwhile are Scots, Irish and Welsh patriots, while in the eyes of the world, however, they are English poets (and writers and thinkers). For me, living as I do in Central Europe, it is virtually incomprehensible how anybody can be a poet or writer

without living in complete harmony with the language in which he or she writes and mostly lives, when indeed, for historical reasons, he is totally opposed in heart and spirit to it. Paul Celan is the only exception to this in continental Europe I can think of. Some peculiar schizophrenia is at work here. In a Dublin pub, sometime in the early eighties, a well-known Irish writer told me after a couple of pints of Guinness, a troubled look on his face: "...The bloody Brits, murdering, oppressing, exploiting us for centuries, while all the time we've been writing them their fucking literature." That was not just the Guinness talking. *"Though this be madness, yet there is method in't,"* Polonius would comment.

In Morgan's poetry there is a strong, but not dominant, Scots, more particularly Glaswegian strain in subject-matter as well as voice. The way I see it, he sorted his own relationship to the English language in such a way that he stepped out of it whenever he wanted, and one does not need to be Professor Higgins to hear this. There were times when he placed just one leg out, writing English larded with Scots words and words sounding Scots, as if he were using a written form of that familiar, typical Scots accent, but then there were also times when, with certain poets (for reasons that were never fully clear to me), he set himself almost entirely outside, writing in what to me is almost totally incomprehensible Lallans. For example, a number of the poems in *Poems from Eugenio Montale* (1959) are in straightforward English, though one or two are in a densely Scottish voice, if not fully Lallans; Platen, Leopardi, Mayakovsky, and Neruda, however, were thickly packaged in Scots. It is also possible to read his Scots versions of Lady Macbeth's speeches, which—given the subject—is perfectly justified, and so on. The Hungarian poets speak in a rich, flexible and nuanced English voice, naturally in whatever style the given poet called for. But then the Henry Higginses of this world no doubt would be able to discern the Scotsman in his use of language and word choice, perhaps even down to pinpointing the Glasgow address as 19 Whittingehame Court.

Looking at Morgan's life's work as a translator, I cannot see any overarching direction which guided him except that quality always came first. From his early work onward, starting with *Beowulf: A Verse Translation into Modern English* (1952) through to what were then still youngish Hungarian poets he only ever engaged with poetry of the first rank in some dozen languages. I can only guess that what guided his choice of poems in languages that were essentially unknown to him was the advice of native speakers doing much the same job as I did with Hungarian. He was clearly attracted to things that did not as yet exist in English/Scots but could throw light on a foreign world and culture, on the mind and soul of another poet or, if a translation already existed, it was not to his taste or he wanted to compete with it. An insatiable curiosity and intellectual adventurousness were at work in him; a passion for mediation, for introducing others, and,

undoubtedly, a desire to enrich his mind and prove to himself that, "See here! I know this too, I can do this as well."

That alone, of course, is not enough to produce an outstanding translation. A high degree of empathy is needed and a rare capacity for self-sacrifice as a translator has to give a voice to foreign experiences and a foreign poetic temperament just as a theatrical role is assumed by an actor who must leave his self and life back in the dressing room. To produce a mirror-image of a poem in another language is an impossibility from the outset, just as the mental spur which prompted another poet to write cannot be experienced. That is where empathy comes in. Just like an actor, a poet-translator must search for the tools to do the job in himself, his own fantasies, properties and abilities. Superb translations exist but no perfect translations. Every translation will be different, even if the translator is the same. They may likewise be superb, but there is no such thing as *the* definitive translation. That is one of the reasons why time will of necessity start to eat away at every translation, however superb. A translator needs to be mindful of all this.

I shall refrain from giving a long list of the Hungarian poets who found a superlative translator in Edwin Morgan. I first came into contact with him in the latter half of the sixties and did not even have to persuade him to translate. He also took it for granted that he would need a rough translation. The uninstructed may think that a rough translation is a draft which is true in form and content to the original text, a helpmate, a first try which only needs a poet's corrections, approval and polishing. Nothing could be further from the truth. To start with, rough translations of poems are in prose and, moreover, the most precise possible literal versions of the original text—disconcertingly off-putting pedestrian pieces of reading matter. A poetic sensibility and talent is needed even for anyone to get a sense of where the poetry can possibly lie in such a text, let alone something special.

A good rough translation is not just a helpmate but the raw material itself. The person preparing it should not make any attempt at reproducing poetry that may influence the translator, limiting the possibilities and saving him/her from racking his/her brains, all of which would be to the detriment of the poem in translation. What one has, therefore, is the stripped-down content, and all the supplementary information that is needed to make a poem out of this mass of raw text should be appended separately. For a translator most certainly needs a mass of background information, like who the poet is, the kind of milieu he comes from, when and how he lived/lives, what linguistic register or style and pitch is employed, and so on. The content too may well carry a wealth of information about objects or concepts that need explanation, particularly when the poem stems from a country with a history and culture so very different from those of the people using the target language, and a language such as Hungarian which is non-Indo-European. Thus metaphors, similes and

colloquialisms which possibly do not exist in English, to say nothing of allusions, references, humorous turns of phrase simply cannot be footnoted because a poem with footnotes is ridiculous. Some poems also have hidden meanings as was often the case with Hungarian poems born under the conditions of a dictatorship. And prosody has not even been mentioned so far. The metrical structure, any rhyme scheme (if there is any), any inversions of word order in the original poem (if there are any), the poet's distinctive handling of form and any irregularities, etc., etc.

All this was sent by air mail from Budapest to Glasgow, and I would invariably receive, by the agreed deadline, a spotless, fully finished English rendering which bore not the slightest trace of translationese. Morgan was an omnivorous translator, never returning anything I earmarked for him. He avoided trying to reproduce untranslatable puns, fooling-around with language and trickeries of metre and had such an unerring ability to substitute a neat solution of his own which was of equivalent value that I was always amazed by his inventiveness. That included a wicked sense of humour. It verges on the incredible just how many poetic worlds, each markedly different from the others, he was able to enter effortlessly and transform yet still keep his own identity like a chameleon. Attila József (1905–37) for one, who ended his desperately tragic life by his own hand, (two selections of translations of his poems) the protean Sándor Weöres, who appeared in 1970 in the Penguin Modern European Poets series, Miklós Radnóti (1909–44), the great poet of the Holocaust; László Nagy (1925–78), with his strong rural roots; the great avant-garde poet Lajos Kassák (1887–1967), whose marvellous *A ló meghal a madarak kirepülnek* (The Horse Dies the Birds Fly Away) was brillinatly rendered by him, to mention only the greatest of the range of poets whose works he tackled, making it seem, I could almost say, as if they had been written in English.

He did all that while being fully aware that in translation poems (and not only poems) are bound to lose quite a lot. It is not only the language that is lost but the exclusivity of authorship as well. A translated poem is no longer *that poem* but something else: a work written by two poets, which at the same time belongs to neither, a translation. One amongst the infinite number of possible approaches in another language; it is a makeshift, an approximation, inevitably not the real thing but the best one can do. That is just the first of the essential paradoxes about translation, another being that it is virtually impossible to write about it: it is futile for me to explain to English readers the great skill with which a solution was found for rendering this or that poem, they would not be able to understand that fully without being able to read the original text. The reverse is also true, of course: Hungarians who cannot read English are equally unable to appreciate Morgan's accomplishment. Morgan knew this. Morgan knew everything worth knowing about translation.

I was not particularly close to Edwin Morgan, only meeting him on four or five occasions: twice in Hungary, twice in Glasgow, once in London, and always briefly. The man I shook hands with was soft-spoken, modest, reticent, extremely pleasant and polite, but with a good sense of humour. If despite the detailed explanations I provided with my rough translations he did not feel sure about some point, he would call me on the phone, as well aware as I was that any such calls were tapped and that letters were read.

I am proud that I was able to work with him and was delighted when Hungary honoured him with the Hungarian PEN Medal in 1972, and the Order of Merit of the by then free Republic of Hungary in 1997. It is mostly due to his example that poets followed suit such as William Jay Smith, Daniel Hoffman, the Frederick Turner–Zsuzsanna Osvath partnership in America, George Szirtes and the George Gömöri–Clive Wilmer partnership in England, to mention just the best. Hungarian poetry is now in good hands overseas. A truly fitting token of thanks for and recognition of an unequalled achievement would, however, be to collect and republish a volume of his translations of more than two hundred Hungarian poems. ❧

LETTER TO THE EDITOR:

I continue to read the The Hungarian Quarterly *with great interest, but I am uncertain if all your contributing writers read each issue. László Borhi in his article "In the Power Arena US–Hungarian Relations 1942–1989" (No. 198, Summer, 2010, p. 70) comments regarding American policy "but they [America] did censure the country [Hungary] for assistance in the deportations" [by which he must mean* of Jewish Hungarians, *my emphasis]. In an earlier article ("Mindless Efficacy", No. 192, Winter, 2008, p. 78) István Deák spells out in precise numbers the "Hungarian" role in the deportations of Jewish Hungarians. Hungary's role was not one of "assistance", but rather the following: "besides Adolf Eichman and his few dozen Gestapo specialists other SS men as well as some German soldiers... [t]he main part of the job was performed by Hungarians, according to some estimates 200,000 of them... from the deputy prefects and district sheriffs all the way to railroad officials and their crews, village clerks, members of the state youth organization and volunteers" (my italics). Some "assistance"! Accurate history is particularly important today given the rise of a fascist party on the far right of Hungarian politics, let alone in memory of my family members (and others) who were deported in the "main" by fellow Hungarians. Many Hungarians, including Professor Borhi, continue to understate the "main" contribution to the mass murder of 500,000 Jewish Hungarians by their fellow Hungarians.*

Michael Kaplan, Portland, Oregon, USA

László Borhi replies: *I do not belong to those who underestimate the Hungarian collaboration in the Holocaust. It is hard to see how this interpretation could be read into the article. This piece was not about the Holocaust but the American and British efforts to hinder the German occupation of Hungary—which in turn led to the Holocaust. In addition, a historian must reaffirm that the inititative for the Holocaust in Hungary, as elsewhere in Europe, came from Nazi Berlin.*

Ágnes Péter

Elective Affinities

The Journal *Nyugat* and Hungarian Cultural Memory

In his *Nyugat* essay on Rilke (1909), after drawing a portrait of his subject, Dezső Kosztolányi finds it necessary to illustrate what he has said:

> I'll quote a poem here in Hungarian; it is for months that I carried the burden of this poem with me wherever I went, on evening walks, on travels, on aimless loitering; I kept repeating it in my mind and in my heart until once in a fifteen-minute span of listless indolence it gave itself up to form and demanded a voice in my mother tongue.

And then he quotes the poem "Du bist der Arme, du der Mittellose" from *Das Stunden-Buch* in his excellent translation. During that long period of gestation, when seemingly nothing was being done to the foreign text, the unconscious was busily doing its own work of appropriation until the poem unexpectedly rose in front of the translator as the perfect rendering of the original in another language. For Kosztolányi translation is

> primarily a creative and critical process. If you want to engage in it you have to know yourself to be the conductor of the orchestra of the words and letters, you have to understand and to feel the original in its entirety; indeed, your understanding and feeling for it have to be so confident, that, if necessary—and it is always necessary—you should be able to alter the original without altering its spirit. [...] You need to have a clear conception of the great target you have to reach, but the small letters—the clods—will also have to be respected. Translation means a constant vigil, a being all eye and ear, all brain and heart, a work that is analytical as well as aiming at synthesis. How much of the spirit of the translator penetrates into the poem is

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Ágnes Péter

is Professor of English at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest. Her academic work includes books on the English Romantic Poets as well as essays on the Hungarian reception of Blake, Keats and Milton. She has translated the selected letters of Keats, John Lanchester's The Debt to Pleasure, *and three volumes of G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown stories.*

almost impossible to say. If he bars his own personality—which can never be barred completely—if he wants to bar it, the result is a soulless linguistic exercise.

He finds his identity as an individual as well as the identity of the community he belongs to in the language they use and share. In his judgment, language is indeed the product of the collective history of the mind and the unconscious of the community: "We all feed upon elusive memories going back to the remotest past, on visions and hallucinations, on the hallucinations of words which bring back to us mysterious echoes from the walls of the caves of the rock of centuries." His concept of language has been compared to that of Humboldt and the German Romantics, but Percy Shelley's sense of the magic of individual languages as well as his desperation—in spite of the fact that he himself was a brilliant translator from six languages—about translatability from language to language can also be found in the *Defence of Poetry:*

> [...] the language of poets has ever affected a certain uniform and harmonious recurrence of sound, without which it were not poetry, and which is scarcely less indispensable to the communication of its influence, than the words themselves, without reference to that peculiar order. Hence the vanity of translation; it were as wise to cast a violet into a crucible that you might discover the formal principle of its colour and odour, as seek to transfuse from one language into another the creations of a poet. The plant must spring again from its seed, or it will bear no flower—and this is the burthen of the curse of Babel.

There is hardly any other period in the Hungarian reception of English literature in which the concept of translation and the attitude of the translator to the work translated has been so intensely personal, as well as so much based on the affinity between poet and translator, as in the time of the journal *Nyugat* (West) (1908–41). In their relentless campaign to make English literary works and critical standards available to the Hungarian public, the poets and critics who contributed to the journal never failed to refer to their own personal experiences as readers, and, indeed, often to their own sense of familial or at least friendly ties with the object of their admiration. In his portrait of Charles Lamb, who was seen by Kosztolányi's own generation as representing a standard of excellence in essay writing, Kosztolányi uses a language that is subjective in the extreme and has a felicity of expression hardly emulated since. By calling Lamb "the clown of mercy" he gives an almost palpable sense of presence to Lamb, and defines his own kinship with him in the following words: "I can probably say that there is hardly anybody in the whole world that is closer to me, that I feel nearer of kin. I admire and love him. I admire and love him perhaps as my own alter ego, that is, in him—as in a more perfect mirror—I admire myself."

In his enthusiastic critical response to Árpád Tóth's volume of translations, *Örök virágok* (Everlasting Flowers, 1923), which contained, in Tóth's superb translation, Milton's "L'Allegro", "Il Penseroso", and "Lycidas", as well as four

of Keats's odes and the "Ode to the West Wind", Mihály Babits also emphasises the importance of affinity between foreign poet and Hungarian translator. In the same essay, with the pride of the leader of a victorious revolution in poetry, he says:

> Some outstandingly important publications in the last couple of years call our attention to an unprecedented eminence reached by Hungarian literary translation. The achievement is the outcome of the last fifteen years. We are proud of it. We think that it is the harvest of the fruit some of us, the men of Nyugat, sowed fifteen years ago, who in and by the title itself of that journal indicated our longing for the more erudite and more profound literatures of the West. [...] We cast our eyes at the West because Hungarian culture has, ever since Kazinczy, in fact ever since St. Stephen, been the Anteus of the West. It was at that time that Ady returned from Paris; in his luggage of poems he brought home with him some translations of Baudelaire and Verlaine as well. Kosztolányi walked the corridors of the university with huge volumes of Leconte de Lisle. I entertained a dream about the Hungarian Dante. [...] Only those who were with us can have any idea of the obstacles— in language and in the hearts—we had to surmount. And now the harvest is come. What was the dream of some of us is now the business and the treasure of all [...] No literary work of real value can be mentioned that cannot now be read in reliable Hungarian translation.

Babits himself made a substantial contribution to this unprecedented rise of creative energy in literary translation unleashed by the intellectual vigour emanating from the journal. In the judgment of Gábor Halász, "when the foreign text was akin to his nature the result was not only beauty but hallucinatory faithfulness". In his translation of minor works, similarly to Kosztolányi, Babits also tamed the foreign text to his own spiritual character and prosodic taste. "I have often changed the text," he admits, "simply because I preferred—in Hungarian—the altered version. There are deliberate misunderstandings in the poems. And some, like Charmides or the Lotos-eaters, are filled to the brim with the imaginary world of my own poetry, with the colours of my own soul." The work on longer texts seems to have offered to him a haven against the growing barbarism and the destructive trends of the age. He started to translate *The Tempest* after the outbreak of World War I, when military mobilization began in Hungary. Later, in his commentary on the translation, he defined his motivation as a desperate effort to escape from the temporal events by absorption in the play:

> To escape into a world of dreams, where in the face of some great, wise and benign Fate—all the enmities, the woe, the wickedness, all the horror of life seem so harmless, even ridiculous as the clod the man of the fields stumbles over. My energy and concentration which all creative work requires to such a great extent were

completely benumbed by the great anxieties of those months. I, however, wanted to keep my mind busy and release it for hours at least each day from life by translation: it was this mood that made the task so attractive.

This vigorous activity in the field of translation as a means of mediation between Hungary and what was called the West was coupled by the critics of the journal with intense efforts to revaluate the native traditions and to define the place of Hungarian culture on the map of Europe. The two historical narratives of literature, Babits's *Az európai irodalom története* (The History of European Literature, 1934–35) and Antal Szerb's *A világirodalom története* (The History of World Literature, 1941), seem to be personal confessions elicited by the darkening horizon, the sinister ideological, political threats that challenged the traditional values associated by Nyugat with their own concept of Europe. Babits had a firm belief in the sustaining power of what today would probably be called the cultural memory of the community. He had the illusion that the cultural traditions represented a set of commonly shared values which offered an escape route from the chaos and anarchy of the time. Actually, he identified the concept of order with the concept of culture, and with that of literature within culture. In his novel *Halálfiai* (Sons of Death) he offers a summary definition of what poetry consists of: "Poetry is born out of a desire for supreme order in the harmony of thoughts, feelings and words". In the face of the violent and aggressive onslaught of the forces of destruction, however, he had his own doubts about the sense of moral elevation he attributed to the aesthetic experience. In his essay "Új klasszicizmus felé" (Towards a New Classicism) he admits: "The most horrible disappointment that the war brought with it was the emergence of the doubt about the efficacy of spiritual culture; for what, indeed, was the use of our famous spiritual culture in the face of that gory idiocy?" But in 1934–35, when he writes his literary history, he is still motivated by the impossible ambition: "Today, at the time of the slackening of the great current, the disintegration of European culture, the discontinuity and darkening of the European mind, what else can we do but briefly record once more what we are about to forget and put it into a floating bottle for posterity?"

By the 30s Babits's authority had become all-compelling. According to the reminiscences of the younger generations, in their eyes he was a father-figure whose impact was decisive on the minds of his disciples. Ágnes Nemes Nagy, who never met him in person, claims that "there was much in his personality that predestined him to assume the role of the father for a whole era, even for me, who had never seen him. Babits was the image of the father between the two wars in Hungarian literature, with all the weight and vulnerability belonging to the position." His gestures of canonization gained

strength from the fact that by this time he had become a charismatic figure, surrounded and followed by a younger generation whose taste had evidently been shaped by his influence. It was in this position that he composed his *History of European Literature,* a survey which was deeply rooted in the critical discourse of the time. He obviously wanted to defy the nationalistic underpinning of the dominant tone in the literary historiography of the period, namely the racism that became more and more articulate and threatening, as well as the historicist theses of the Marxist concept of literature.

His stance as reader of the major works of great individual writers is defined by his vision of Hungarian literature as part of European culture. As he sees it, Hungarian literature has had all the periods that have constituted the history of the great European literatures, and its value can be measured by the specific colours it has added to European culture as a whole. He sees the history of European literature as a gradual falling away from unity, and he considers the emergence of national literatures as the outcome of the overall tendency of disintegration.

In Antal Szerb's view, on the other hand, it is in the histories of national literatures that the source of the concept of Europe as a cultural entity can be found: it is national literatures which have gradually, through integration, constituted the cultural unity of Europe. For Babits, who is an upholder of tradition, the critical problem is the loss of unity; for Szerb, who is eager to welcome new traditions, the solution to the historical antagonisms in Europe lies in the establishment of cultural integrity and unity. He also seems to have believed in the power of culture to create a sense of belonging together which might counterbalance the tendency of disruption and barbarism. In his previously composed *Magyar irodalomtörténet* (History of Hungarian Literature, 1934), Hungarian literature is discussed in a European context: "it is impossible to explain Hungarian culture in itself, for it can only be understood if it is seen as a growth stimulated by the development of European culture; perhaps it carries its metaphysical meaning not in itself but in the mission of European culture". In 1941, when writing his *History of World Literature,* he is still motivated by his ambition to refine the moral sensibility of the reader through the efficacy of a personal account of his own interpretation of the spiritual values accumulated during the history of European culture:

> I would like to transmit something of the pleasure, the catharsis, the sense of being possessed that I have felt when reading the individual works.[...] I desperately hope that my book might contribute to the expansion and strengthening of the small confraternity of real readers. [...] For the world badly needs some goodness...

For Szerb, who was eighteen years Babits's junior, Babits was already the established master. Regarding Babits's efforts to reassess the nature of Vörösmarty's poetic world, he says:

> Towards the real Vörösmarty the first step was taken by Mihály Babits in his two essays on the poet, in which, with his Venetian magic wand, he touched those points in Vörösmarty's oeuvre where the treasure had been buried, the treasure that he found the most akin to his own as well as to our own sensibility today. He speaks about 'unknown islands', and after his great expedition of discovery now smaller vessels might also set sail on the sea.

For Szerb's generation it was already evident that Babits had managed to carry out a radical revaluation of Hungarian poetic traditions as well as to get this revaluation accepted by his disciples, but Szerb also knew that Babits—like all great innovators—had to face "the bitterness of being attacked from two sides".

And, indeed, Szerb's sense of direction in modern literature was more reliable and more up-to-date than that of his master. One interesting example is Babits's exclusive interest in the lyric output of the English Romantic period: in his *History of European Literature* only the briefest mention is made of Wordsworth's *Prelude:*

> The leisurely run of his blank verse evokes the fitful association of ideas from a youthful past that by now is lost, and there is also something banal in its excessive flow. The great poet has started to become what he is going to be in his later years: monotonous and loquacious.

Szerb, on the other hand, seems to understand the importance of Wordsworth's autobiography as an anticipation of Modernism:

> In his meditative poetic fragments of enormous length *(The Recluse, The Prelude, The Excursion),* he wants to tell the story of his soul. In the history of the soul, all the minute details are important; indeed, it is only the minute details that are important, because it is they that make one *remember.* They make one remember in the mystic, or, if you like, Proustian, sense of the word: there is a sound, an image, a perfume, and unexpectedly everything assumes a deeper meaning; we intuit relationships among things which are beyond the reach of words; we find the infinite in the finite. Wordsworth is the poet of these wonderful moments.

Szerb's unwavering trust in the power of a shared cultural tradition is displayed in a most painful way in the diary of his journey in Italy, published immediately in *Nyugat* after his return, under the title *The Third Tower*. The essayistic journal seems to be a document of his desperate search for inner harmony—which he calls "serenity"—as a protective shield against the horrors anticipated by the political events in Europe. At the end of the journey, harassed by the threatening atmosphere in his beloved Italy that by now has been badly distorted by the presence of the mob stirred up by Mussolini's aggressive ideology, he unexpectedly remembers the supreme self-sufficiency of Milton's Satan:

> I'm tired. I might be ready to go home. The panic is over; I've been restored; I've managed to find strength in secret resources. There will be a way, courage. Whatever price is offered, whatever comes, don't give up your solitude. Then, after all, nothing can be taken away from you. How is it said by Milton's Satan in the burning wilderness of the underworld? 'What matters where, if I be still the same.' Whatever happens in Europe, keep your trust in your private stars. There will always be a Third Tower [previously he describes how he had a glimpse of serenity when looking down from the eminence of the Third Tower of San Marino at the landscape below him] somewhere for you in the world. And that should be enough.

The power of the Third Tower of course proved to be a delusion.

The legacy of *Nyugat* has recently been reassessed and redefined in Hungary on the occasion of the centenary of its launch. The concept of the translators defined by the critical principles of *Nyugat* is still with us, although scholarship and spiritual affinity are combined in the complicated multipersonal process of translating, editing and publication. Literary historiography, however, seems to have been replaced by a radically altered agenda. The novelty of Babits's and Szerb's approach lay in their integrated view of the European context in which Hungarian literature was evaluated by them against the general laws motivating the rhythm and growth of all European literatures. Since about the late 1980s, however, a new notion has emerged in the discussions of literary history which lays a special emphasis on the interaction of the cultural traditions in Europe. It is probably not so much the unity of European culture but the diversity of literatures and cultural traditions that constitutes it: the analogies and points of contact between national literatures that preoccupy the minds of literary historians. The new approaches reject the orthodox Marxist traditions that regard literature as a reflection of an underlying "reality"; at the same time the authority of "internalist" histories is also called into question, together with their tendency to isolate literature from its cultural milieu. It has also been recognized that no literary, intellectual or cultural history is complete without a record of the responses to it that come from the outside. Most discussions of the literary traditions are now cast in the framework of what is called cultural memory, the dynamic, ever changing set of values shared by the community which is responsible for the way in which we construct our past.

The study of memory can be traced back to antiquity. For Plato memory is evidence that the soul is immortal. In this respect probably his deepest insight suggests that recollection and forgetting are simultaneous or interdependent processes. In *Phaedo,* Socrates shows equanimity in the face of imminent death exactly because he is convinced that the event will be a release from bondage, as the ability of man to know stems from his ability to recollect his

prenatal existence. The "dark backward and abysm of time" is connected with our present consciousness because we are able to remember; indeed, for the Romantics, it is remembrance that constitutes individual identity: "each man is a memory to himself", as Wordsworth puts it, in what, as Szerb well knew, was one of the greatest modern documents of the process of remembering. Cultural memory is what gives communities a sense of belonging together. It very often has a traumatic effect, the kind of terrifying sublime experience that Keats described in terms of the lineaments of Moneta's face in *The Fall of Hyperion:* it was *"a wan face, / Not pin'd by human sorrows, but bright blanch'd / By an immortal sickness which kills not; / It works a constant change, which happy death / Can put no end to..."* Our past is actually constituted in the way Moneta's face is read in Keats's poem: by remembering we establish some contact with our individual or shared past which "works a constant change", depending on the psychological, emotional and intellectual condition controlled by our present.

At the Department of English Studies of Eötvös Loránd University a research project has been started under the title *British Literature and the Hungarian Cultural Memory.* The project, which is supported by an OTKA (National Scientific and Cultural Programme, NK71770) grant, has the long-term aim to collect and assess data towards the writing of a history of British literature in terms of the Hungarian responses to British authors and critical assumptions. The responses to the same phenomena have obviously changed over time, since they have always been coloured by individual sensibilities and the ever-changing motivations of communities, institutions and the historical ambience.

The workshops and the two conferences were organised within the framework of the project seem to define the activity of *Nyugat* as a nodal point in the history of the reception of English literature in Hungary. The proceedings of the first conference have already been published: the volume[1] contains sixteen essays, four of which focus more or less directly on the work as editors, critics, essayists, authors of some of the members of the circle intellectually or institutionally affiliated with the journal. In September 2010 an international conference was held: the thirty-two papers presented there by internationally well-known senior academics and promising young researchers will be published in 2011: the volume(s) will certainly document interesting hypotheses as well as theses on the questions raised by the project proposal of the research team.

In terms of chronology, the research project concentrates on the 19th and 20th centuries. At the beginning of the period under scrutiny the Hungarian

1 ■ Gárdos Bálint, Péter Ágnes, Ruttkay Veronika, Timár Andrea, Vince Máté eds., *Idegen költők – Örök barátaink. Világirodalom és a magyar kulturális emlékezet* [Foreign Poets–Eternal Friends. World Literature and Hungarian Cultural Memory]. Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2010.

Shakespeare and the Hungarian Milton appear to play a distinguished part in stimulating the formation of the theses of Romantic aesthetics, in defining the qualities of the poetry and the drama of the 19th century and in establishing the traditions of the Hungarian theatre. At the other end of the chronological scale, the most interesting problem that is raised is that of the linguistic and staging concepts underlying the Shakespeare adaptations of the postmodern theatre.

What seems to be the novelty of the concept of the research team was anticipated by Babits, who defined the most important ways of assimilation as well as ways of appropriation in the history of intercultural relations. In 1910, writing about Vörösmarty's translation of *King Lear,* Babits says:

> The movement initiated by Vörösmarty led back to the original Shakespeare, and it is the original Shakespeare whose features are most akin to the character of our ancient poetry that in their translations our greatest poets highlighted: his uncouth power, his plebeian wit, his sensuous imagination, his humour, and also the declamatory effect that surfaces here and there. That is why Shakespeare has indeed been assimilated into our culture; since Vörösmarty, translations of Shakespeare's works, productions of his plays, and the number of his admirers, have increased. And he has had an impact on the poetry of the translators; the traces of his language, his vision, his poetic qualities are there.

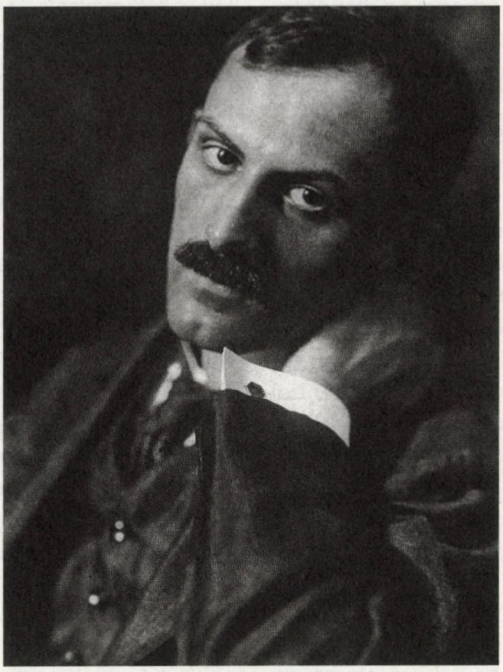
Vörösmarty's *King Lear* is the *Urtext* for us; it has been the most important stimulus in the long process that evolved since its publication in 1856. It has been amended, responded to, presented on the stage, and redefined in its 20th-century translations, but it is Vörösmarty's version that is most organically and creatively rooted in the linguistic potential of Hungarian poetry, and consequently the text is a very important document of one of the great moments in the history of the codification of poetic language, and it is also seen as a standard of excellence in the definition of the psychological, linguistic and scenic possibilities inherent in Hungarian poetic traditions which are deeply engraved in the Hungarian cultural memory.

Another most interesting case study might be mentioned which is also strongly connected with the legacy of *Nyugat.* It is thanks to the enthusiastic admiration of the critics of the journal that Keats was introduced to the Hungarian reader. In their own idiosyncratic ways, four critics more or less closely affiliated with *Nyugat,* Babits, Szerb, László Németh and Georg Lukács, opened up some of the unending possibilities that lie in Keats's poetry (and letters). In the reading of Babits and Szerb that Keats anticipates, or actually practices *l'art pour l'art,* his insistent and very refined reference to Beauty make him "the greatest poet of English Aestheticism" (Szerb). Németh's discussion of *The Fall of Hyperion* in 1932, which he published in his journal

Tanú (Witness), is a most obvious example of appropriation: he reads the epic fragment through the lens of his own "metapolitical programme", which he called "the revolution of quality". Keats's Apollo is offered by Németh to illustrate his concept of quality which is based on German philosophical sources and serves as a more or less irrational principle that may resolve social conflicts by giving more space to the influence of the cultural traditions of the Hungarian peasantry, the uppermost layer of which Németh saw as rising to middle-class status. In his youthful work *Die Seele und die Formen* (Soul and Form, 1910), Georg Lukács attributes a distinctive quality to the poetic career of Keats. He defines the Romantics in terms of their efforts to produce a poetic world in response to the reality of life, which creates the tension that is the moving force behind their careers: "They created a homogeneous organic world unified within itself and identified it with the real world. This gave their world a quality of something angelic, suspended between heaven and earth, incorporeally luminous," but the tremendous tension that exists between poetry and life in the careers of the Romantic poets leads to frustration or to a "return with resignation to the quiet waters of the old religions". In his opinion, Keats was able to resolve this dichotomy of creation and life in a higher synthesis: "Keats's life outgrows his poetry because he thinks his being-as-a-poet through to the end, embraces a saintly asceticism, he renounces life; and the two—life, in particular in the case of Keats, a backdrop to verse—combine in a new and higher unity." Lukács's aesthetic stance underwent very radical changes in later years. In the Kádár era, although his ideologically committed historicist critical stance was never orthodox, and although because of his great international reputation he obviously was an embarrassment for the establishment, his preference for realism over romanticism appeared to dominate the typical discourse on the legacy of the Romantic aesthetic tradition. Keats in the 50s and 60s was seen as a representative of what was called "revolutionary" Romanticism, and as late as 1991 Keats is still classified as an "active" Romanticist as distinct from the "passive" members of the Romantic school like Wordsworth and Coleridge in *Világirodalmi Lexikon* (Encyclopedia of World Literature). Obviously the influence of the New Historicism is likely to redefine the import of what Keats means to Hungarians to a significant extent. The relationship between the new historicist image of Keats and Lukács's substantial contribution to Hungarian criticism must be explored by later research.

An obvious stimulations to the history of the English impact on Hungarian criticism (and in the history of the Hungarian impact upon the definition of the European context of English critical traditions) may come through the translation of hitherto neglected texts of criticism. To return to where this essay started: the project supported by the OTKA grant might make it possible for the present generation of scholars of English literature to realize some of

the plans prescribed for future literary studies by Babits, who, in 1920, when compiling a list of English literary works which he thought should be translated into Hungarian in the nearest future because, in his view, they represented the most characteristic achievements of the English mind in literature and criticism. He included in his list of desiderata the *Essays of Elia.* A PhD dissertation is now complete in which the genre of the essay as conceived by Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt and Charles Lamb is discussed in a European context, and some essays hitherto unavailable in Hungarian by Hazlitt and Hunt have now been translated and published. Mihály Babits's list includes Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria,* "the codification of the new Romantic aesthetic theory, [...] certainly one of the most important critical works of the century", in Babits's statement. A young scholar has been working on a translation of Coleridge's critical autobiography for some time now. Inspired (and intimidated) by the legacy of *Nyugat,* the translation, together with the other efforts of the research team, will hopefully change, even if to a moderate extent, the Hungarian image of English literature, as well as the image of literature in Hungarian that is cherished in the minds of many readers. ❧



Mihály Babits, 1913
Photograph by Aladár Székely

Ivan Sanders

A Legacy Revisited

Gergely Angyalosi, Csilla E. Csorba, Ernő Kulcsár Szabó and György Tverdota, eds., *Nyugat népe: Tanulmányok a Nyugatról és koráról* (People of the West: The Journal *Nyugat* [West] and Its Age). Budapest: Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum, 2009, 439 pp., illustrated • Ágnes Kelevéz and Judit Szilágyi, eds., *Nyugat-Képeskönyv: Fotók, dokumentumok a Nyugat történetéből* (A *Nyugat* Picture Book: Photographs and Documents). Budapest: Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum, 2009, 286 pp.

Many years ago I decided to read methodically the first few volumes of *Nyugat*. And not just dip into each issue, but read it from start to finish, every single poem, story, essay, review, down to the notices and ads. I didn't get very far. It's impossible to read a journal this way, I realized; a little like reading a dictionary from cover to cover. But my greatest surprise and disappointment was at discovering that next to pieces of literature that have since become modern classics, there were mediocre poems, undistinguished short stories, and article after article written in a Hungarian that struck me as stilted and outdated. Clearly, behind my disappointment was the widely held notion that *Nyugat* is the *ne plus ultra* of literary magazines, by far the most significant and influential Hungarian journal of the twentieth century, edited for twenty years with dedication and perseverance by the legendary Ernő Osvát, a journal that for thirty-three years published the best of the best. To appear in its pages was a mark of distinction, and for fledgeling poets and writers, an initiation, a rite of passage. It's also true of course that masterpieces are not born every two weeks (*Nyugat* was a bimonthly) and, inevitably, changes in fashion and taste led to reappraisals as well as a reshuffling of the lineup of the journal's luminaries. Yet the mystique of *Nyugat*, its aura of greatness, hasn't dissipated. And the best evidence of this is the present collection of essays about the journal and its life from 1908 to 1941, when it dominated Hungarian literary life.

The published essays and studies were originally papers presented at a conference held in Budapest to mark the hundredth anniversary of the founding of *Nyugat*. On the one hand, the authors take note of the changing literary fortunes of *Nyugat* writers, but as a testament to the enduring legacy of the journal, they also suggest that everything about *Nyugat* is important; the periodical itself, all

Ivan Sanders
is Adjunct Professor at Columbia University's East Central European Center. He is currently at work on a book on Central European Jewish writers and literature.

thirty-three volumes of it, is now an invaluable document, which means that the minor works of major *Nyugat* figures also deserve attention, and even works by forgotten, minor writers are worth examining, if only because they appeared in *Nyugat*. In an interesting essay about the clash between home values and school values and about the underlying assumptions of education in *fin-de-siècle* Hungary as reflected in novels about teachers and schooldays, Zsuzsa Cserhalmi discusses major works by Zsigmond Móricz, Dezső Kosztolányi, Mihály Babits—and she also refers to Felicián Kupcsay (not exactly a household name in twentieth-century Hungarian literature), whose novel about a schoolboy's difficulties adjusting to a school environment also appeared in *Nyugat*. This novel bolsters Zsuzsa Cserhalmi's argument about overconfident, overreaching teachers, though to her credit she does mention that Felicián Kupcsay's novel, "important with respect to my subject, is *only* important with respect to my subject."

Naturally, no one seriously wants to rethink the canon or radically revise rankings. Nobody in his right mind would argue, for instance, that just because Oszkár Gellért published hundreds of poems in *Nyugat,* numerically topped only by Endre Ady, he should be seen as the second greatest *Nyugat* poet. Ady and his extraordinary poetic output embodied the very spirit of literary modernity that *Nyugat* stood for, whereas Gellért, though an important figure in the history of *Nyugat,* was a middling poet. The overestimation of his gifts by Ernő Osvát is usually seen as a conspiciuous blunder by an editor whose literary judgments were otherwise well-nigh infallible. Ágnes Kelevéz, in her survey of the anniversary and memorial issues of the journal, mentions that while Oszkár Gellért's stature was diminished by the passage of time, the reputation of the retiring, sensitive Gyula Juhász has grown steadily, and he is now ranked among the major *Nyugat* poets, even though the journal published relatively few of his poems; for years he disappeared from its pages, and when he died, in 1936, there was no memorial issue devoted to his life and works, as there were upon the death of other *Nyugat* greats.

Yet, there have been subtle and not so subtle shifts over the years in the reputation even of leading *Nyugat* writers; in the attention they have received from scholars and the reading public. In an article written by István Vas in 1971, on the thirtieth anniversary of the termination of *Nyugat,* the distinguished third-generation *Nyugat* poet bemoans the fact that "[Mihály] Babits has been defeated; neither his poetry nor his spirit has any real impact... His major opponents have won the day: Dezső Szabó and László Németh, [Lajos] Kassák and [György] Lukács. In the hearts and minds of young people, they occupy the place that, in my view, should be his... This situation, in the short run, is not likely to change."

In recent years, however, the tide has turned. Babits is now seen as a towering literary figure who was both a traditionalist and an innovator but who remained defiantly non-ideological and non-political, and in desperate times clung to the humanist values of the Judeo-Christian tradition, at once deeply rooted in the native soil and a European of the first order. In addition to being one of the great poets of his generation, Babits was also a remarkable novelist and essayist, to say nothing of his *History of*

European Literature, which displays his erudition and has the added virtue of being highly readable. Mihály Babits was also a superb translator, as were most of the *Nyugat* writers and poets.

It is perhaps no accident that the present collection contains more studies devoted to Babits and his works (four in number) than to any other writer associated with *Nyugat.* (For those interested in such statistics: Dezső Kosztolányi, Endre Ady and Ignotus get two essays each; Margit Kaffka and Ernő Osvát one each. No individual essays on Frigyes Karinthy, Milán Füst or Gyula Krúdy.) Moreover, in the index of names, the number of references to Babits is by far the largest. It may be simplistic to gauge shifts in popularity on the basis of such tallies, but perhaps they shouldn't be discounted altogether. It is also tempting to theorize that in the first decade of the twenty-first century, in an over-politicized social and cultural environment, it is not surprising that someone like Mihály Babits, who never really swerved to the left or the right but remained an erudite literary artist, a true *poeta doctus,* should appeal to critics as well as to serious readers.

It's worth mentioning that an author closely associated with the early years of *Nyugat,* who has become widely known in his own country only in recent decades and better known abroad as well through translations, does not get much exposure in the anniversary volume. I have in mind Géza Csáth, a highly gifted fiction writer and a brilliant, versatile mind who died tragically at the age of thirty-two in 1919. For many years Csáth was too hot to handle. A story like "Matricide", which first appeared in an early issue of *Nyugat,* was deemed too daring and decadent to be published in the Hungary of the 1950s and early 60s. The first post-war edition of his stories came out in 1964. The rediscovery and growing fame of Géza Csáth must be one of the sensations of recent Hungarian literary history. (Csáth's stories can now be read in two different English translations and his diary was also translated.)[1] Yet there is no focus on his achievements in any of the studies included in *Nyugat népe.* It is only in the companion volume of documents, *Nyugat-Képeskönyv,* that Csáth gets his due. Here we find three photographic images of him, including a little-known portrait of three cousins: Géza Csáth, Dezső Jász and Dezső Kosztolányi, and a reproduction of the beautiful Art Nouveau cover, designed by Lajos Kozma, of one of his collections of stories, *Délutáni álom* (An Afternoon Dream), published by *Nyugat* in 1908.

From a comparatist's point of view, it is the studies that place the age of *Nyugat* in a broader cultural context, or those that approach the *Nyugat* phenomenon with different forms of mediation, that are particularly interesting and thought-provoking. A good example of the first type is Ernő Kulcsár Szabó's introductory essay, "A *Nyugat* kultúrafogalma és kulturális orientációja" (*Nyugat*'s Culture Concept and Cultural Orientation), in

1 ■ It should be noted, too, that English translations of masterpieces by two *Nyugat* writers—Frigyes Karinthy's *A Journey Round My Skull* and Dezső Kosztolányi's *Skylark,* first serialized in *Nyugat*—have recently appeared in new editions. In a piece published in *The New York Review of Books,* Deborah Eisenberg, a distinguished writer and critic, discusses *Skylark* as a rediscovered modern classic. (See Deborah Eisenberg, "Quiet, Shattering, Perfect," *The New York Review of Books,* April 8, 2010, pp. 62–66.)

which he posits that *Nyugat* was able to maintain a delicate balance and create a fluid continuum between different concepts of culture, tradition and modernity—between Babits's conservative view of tradition and Ignotus's much more radical definition of modernity. György Eisemann's highly original essay, "A modernitás médiuma" (The Medium of Modernity) offers an entirely different "reading" of *Nyugat*—a semiotic analysis of the very first cover of the journal. We find another take on modernity in Gábor Schein's essay on the "territorization" of Budapest in the first volumes of *Nyugat*. Using Carl Schorske's distinction between "modernity" and "modernism" as his starting point, Schein shows quite convincingly that there was a sizable gap between the idea of the modern espoused by *Nyugat* and the belles-lettres it published about fin-de siècle and early 20th-century Budapest life. The habits of mind and patterns of speech that this literature captured harked back to an earlier, quainter urban experience. And this was true even (or especially) for the largely Jewish inhabitants of Budapest's inner districts, who were otherwise firm believers in economic and political modernization.

The more traditional literary historical studies in the volume also attempt to situate *Nyugat* in an international literary environment. For example, György Tverdota's comparative study of the first twenty years of *Nyugat* and the French literary periodical *La Nouvelle Revue Française* is a response to, and in a way a refutation of, the oft-stated charge that despite the goal and ideal expressed in the name, the founding fathers of *Nyugat* were out of synch with the latest Western trends. The poets were still in thrall of the symbolists and, in prose, the late 19th-century free-thinking realists. Tverdota's comparison shows that *Nyugat* kept apace with literary developments in Europe. If anything, the Hungarian journal was more receptive to early avant-garde movements than its sister publication in France. Tverdota defends *Nyugat* from an attack by Andor Németh, who in an article published in 1929 compared *Nyugat* unfavourably with the *NRF*, calling the former an "age-worn periodical".

Equally interesting and revealing is Ágnes Széchenyi's piece on *Jung Ungarn, "Nyugat*'s German counterpart", edited and published in Berlin in 1911. The monthly was the counterpart of *Nyugat* only in the sense that the same Jewish patrons financed it who kept *Nyugat* afloat. The aim of *Jung Ungarn*—like that of other similar publications—was to acquaint foreign readers in their own language with the political, economic and cultural life of a linguistically isolated country. But whereas other journals of this type (including *The Hungarian Quarterly*) have had long lives, *Jung Ungarn* lasted only one year. We learn from Ágnes Széchenyi's survey that the German-language publication reported on new cultural developments in Hungary and featured works by *Nyugat* writers. It also tried to present a balanced picture of Hungarian society. For example, it published in one of its issues an essay by the conservative politician and statesman, István Tisza. And the roster of periodicals *Jung Ungarn* surveyed regularly included arch-conservative publications.

Ultimately—for this reviewer, at any rate—the most impressive studies in the collection are those that offer new interpretations of major works and reassessments of positions taken and causes espoused by major writers. Take,

for example, András Veres's thoroughgoing account of the ups and downs of Dezső Kosztolányi's relationship with fellow *Nyugat* writers, his momentary embrace of the far right after 1919, and the difficult return to his "skeptical, attentive" self; or Mihály Szegedy-Maszák's carefully developed analysis of Kosztolányi's *Anna Édes,* showing that the novel is much more open-ended and ambiguous in its historical and moral judgments than critics have hitherto believed; or Anna Cséve's cogent study of the interaction of biography and fiction in Zsigmond Móricz's works. Cséve shows that the robust Móricz had a lust for life as well as a burning conscience, and his inner torments and marital crises were transmuted into compelling fiction. And then there is what to me is the centrepiece of the volume: Péter Dávidházi's illuminating philological investigation of the "poetics of leaving out" in Mihály Babits's *Book of Jonah.* Dávidházi argues that in his masterpiece Babits, while retaining the power of the biblical narrative, created a highly complex modern poem. To be sure, there are also studies on important and exciting topics—*Nyugat* and the visual arts, *Nyugat* and the avant-garde, sports and *Nyugat*—that are short on new ideas and insights.

It is fairly well known that the early *Nyugat* greats were a disputatious group. There were estrangements, separations, feuds. Some spats were quickly patched up, others went on for years and outlasted the death of one or the other warring party. Lajos Hatvany, who was not only the major financial backer of *Nyugat* but an astute littérateur in his own right, had his differences with Ernő Osvát (which led to a duel), Kosztolányi tried to pick holes in the Ady legend, Ady quarreled with Babits, Babits with Móricz, and so on. The photographs included in the attractive *A* Nyugat *Picture Book* reflect none of this discord. Some of them, like the famous picture of Ady and Babits poring over the pages of an old Bible, are positively idyllic. The pictures taken at *Nyugat*'s twenty-fifth anniversary celebration, held in the great hall of Budapest's Academy of Music, also suggest unity, with the stalwarts of the first generation looking elegant in formal attire. There is a shot of a reading held by Zsigmond Móricz on the stage of the concert hall. Seated at a long table are not only the founders, but members of the second generation, some of whom would later leave *Nyugat* and become its vocal critics. There are quite a few pictures of the grand cafés frequented by *Nyugat* writers. (After leafing through the album, my Columbia students concluded that these people must have spent half their lives in cafés. I had to tell them that they were not far from the truth.) The most famous of these literary and artist cafés—the New York, the Central—were restored in recent years and again look splendiferous; but they are too pricey now to become meeting places for poets and painters.

The material presented in *A Nyugat Picture Book* was culled from the exhibit mounted by the Petőfi Literary Museum on the hundredth anniversary of the founding of *Nyugat*. The album contains not only photographs but also letters, notes, handbills, posters and other *Nyugat* memorabilia, as well as relevant quotes to go with the photos. It seems that every artifact, every scrap of paper associated with *Nyugat* has come to be seen as a precious relic of a great literary age. Which is not to say that either volume is in any way

reverential. In fact, even a superficial comparison with the proceedings of a similar *Nyugat* symposium held in the Petőfi Literary Museum thirty-eight years ago, in 1972, reveals that the papers read at the 2008 conference were generally more inventive and adventurous. And not only because the scholars and critics responsible for the present volume are no longer encumbered by the ballast of a dominant ideology. They are simply less inhibited and more willing to take a long and hard look at iconic literary figures and a legend.

In 1972 *Nyugat* did not yet have the aura it has today; there were debates about the journal's true importance[2], to say nothing of other, then still sensitive issues. Many at the 1972 conference had vivid memories of the *Nyugat* years, including the many quarrels. At least one participant, Aladár Komlós, had been a frequent contributor to *Nyugat*. A century after the birth of the famed literary magazine, the mystique is there, but also the freedom to take on *Nyugat* boldly, squarely. ❧

2 ■ See Lóránt Kabdebó, ed., *Vita a Nyugatról* [Debate About *Nyugat*], Budapest: Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum/Népművelési Propaganda Iroda, 1973.

Krisztina Passuth

Hungarians at the Bauhaus

From Art to Life: Hungarians at the Bauhaus. 15 August–24 October, 2010, Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs • Von Kunst zu Leben. Die Ungarn am Bauhaus. 1 December 2010–21 February 2011, Bauhaus-Archiv Museum für Gestaltung, Berlin. Catalogues in Hungarian and in German ed. by Éva Bajkay. Pécs: Janus Pannonius Múzeum & Hungarofest, 419 pp.

As one of the ventures of the Pécs, 2010 European Cultural Capital programme series, the Janus Pannonius Museum put on a major exhibition presenting, for the first time in Hungary, the Bauhaus as an international trend and the essential contribution of the Hungarians within the movement.

The question arises whether—following the comprehensive exhibitions in the United States[1] and Berlin[2]—anything of great import can be added to the celebration of Bauhaus by an exhibition in Hungary. As it so happens the answer is yes, and in fact the show, a joint project with the Bauhaus-Archiv in Berlin, casts light on details and aspects of Bauhaus that will be a revelation for specialists outside Hungary as well. New research, accompanied by monographs[3] on individual artists (seven of the Hungarian Bauhäuslers were born in Pécs, including Marcel Breuer) explains the keen interest on the part of the German experts. Indeed, as the exhibition demonstrates, the Hungarians, the largest national group, both as artists in their own right and as an entity, were a seminal influence from the outset, and especially after 1923.

During its turbulent existence, until it was closed down by its own management under pressure from the Nazi regime, the Bauhaus school existed

1 ■ Modell Bauhaus, 22 July–4 October 2009, Martin Gropius Bau, Berlin.

2 ■ Bauhaus 1919–1933: Workshops for Modernity, 8 November 2009–25 January 2010, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

3 ■ Éva Bajkay, *Under the Spell of Utopia: Andor Weininger,* 2006; Gyula Ernyey ed., *Marcel Breuer, Principles and Results,* 2008; Zsuzsanna Mendöl, *Forbát Alfréd,* 2008; Éva Bajkay, ed., *Molnár Farkas Architect, Painter and Graphic Designer,* 2010, all published by Pannónia Könyvek, Pécs.

Krisztina Passuth

is Professor Emerita at the Department of Art History at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest. Her books include Lajos Tihanyi *(Dresden. 1977);* Moholy-Nagy *(London–New York: Thames & Hudson, 1985);* Les avant-gardes de l'Europe Centrale 1907–1927 *and* Treffpunkte der Avantgarden: Ostmitteleuropa 1907–1930 *(Budapest– Dresden, 2003), and, most recently,* Beöthy István *(Budapest, 2010).*

in three German cities (Weimar 1919–25; Dessau 1925–32 and Berlin 1932–33), under three different architect-directors. Hungarian artists often ended up in Weimar, the most modern art school of the day in Germany, through no specific intention of their own, but rather due to historical and social pressures. Their adoption of this role depended on the individual and also the given situation and was consequentially quite varied. The spectrum included participation in the school's Basic or Preliminary Course for a period of probation complemented with apprenticeship in the workshops, and there were also those who continued, or started out, as Masters teaching courses. As famously formulated by Moholy-Nagy, the philosophy of the Bauhaus was "Life into Art": merging theory and practice. It included individual and collective work, architectural planning in the studio of Walter Gropius and a range of common activities such as summer swimming excursions to the Ilm river, marvellous masked balls and kite processions, experimental light and music evenings, and Oskar Schlemmers "Triadic" abstract ballets under Bauhaus auspices. These occasions welded students of various nationalities together into a community creating what can be considered a Bauhaus way of life. Their heritage is here to stay: the *bauhaus* magazine, the Bauhaus book series, everything that gave the passing experiences and practices a firm theoretical framework and foundation.

Their names mark unique artifacts at public spaces, such as Gropius's sketch of the plans for the *Monument to the March Dead* which was then executed by the Hungarian Alfréd Forbát and drawn by Farkas Molnár, also a Hungarian, in 1922. A huge number of artifacts survived all the destructive tempests of history: paintings, graphics, photos, stage designs, architectural plans and objects made of fine materials and of exquisite shape, classics of modern design. They were created or initiated in the school, in private studios and in the shared workshops. Although the professional network of the most important personages was naturally far more extensive than the closed institutional framework of the school, and they absorbed influences from various other trends, too, the majority of their activities unfolded within the framework of Bauhaus and with the intention of realizing Bauhaus goals.

But what was the Bauhaus? An avant-garde arts centre, the point at which the latest rival trends in arts met, or an educational institution with a strict administration and rules? And how and why did Hungarians become part of it, and why precisely then, around 1920, at the very outset? The current exhibitions—of which Éva Bajkay and György Várkonyi were the curators—and the catalogues offer clear answers to these questions.

The intimate rooms in Pécs, which are interlinked and not overly large, were well-suited to the display of paintings, collages and drawings, generally of moderate size, Bauhaus books, architectural models, design prototypes, carpets and welded artworks, as well as the landmark steel tubular furniture, interiors,

photos, stage designs and experimental textile work. They complemented each other, creating as it were a harmonious ensemble. One could have had the impression one was walking in the original milieu of Weimar or Dessau, in which nothing was overemphasized or overtly emotional. The goal realized by the current exhibition in Hungary corresponded to the Bauhaus ideal: to create a bright and modern interior in which the elements have human proportions and are organized according to the needs of the persons living there.

Established by the integration of an Academy of Arts and the Academy of Arts & Crafts in Weimar, the Bauhaus functioned as an art and design school with a strict curriculum, with presenters who held practical seminars and gave lectures on theory (the latter usually the Masters), and workshop instructors. The institution quickly became the centre of avant-garde thinking and endeavour. Approaches occasionally clashed and conflicts sometimes rose to the surface, and some artists left and were replaced by others. At the time of the foundation of the school in 1919, the mystical "Mazdaznan," a trend close to Expressionism and one of the quasi religious movements of the period based on the teachings of Zoroaster, and so-called "breathing exercises" built on psychological effects dominated. The Swiss painter Johannes Itten, a mystic and Expressionist, stood for all that. Initially the so-called Preliminary or Basic Course was designed by Itten. The course was intended to teach students the basics of material characteristics, composition, and colour. In the course of a few years this trend came to be gradually replaced by a more rational and functional approach and practice. The replacement of Itten in April 1923 by the Hungarian László Moholy-Nagy altered the profile of the school.

Moholy-Nagy represented (and consistently realized) an approach to art bearing affinity with Russian Constructivism and fundamentally opposed to Expressionism. Changes of approach were stimulated by the experiments undertaken collectively by apprentices, instructors and masters in search of new directions and techniques and in an attempt to fashion a new aesthetics. After the appointment of Moholy-Nagy, it became an accepted principle that the functional beauty of the object under design should be valued over the unique aesthetic aura of a given statute or painting. Although recognized painters like Paul Klee, Wassilly Kandinsky, Oskar Schlemmer, Lyonel Feininger and Moholy-Nagy also worked on their own in their studios, each developing his own distinctive style, they also worked with fellow Bauhaus artists in order to formulate commonsense ideas with emphasis on designs for mass production. (The Vhutemas High School in Moscow pursued similar objectives at the time.) All this took place in the politically tense years soon after World War I. For a short period of time, essentially during the first period which lasted until 1925 (when the school relocated to Dessau), the artists managed to create what at least seemed to be a peaceful island in a Europe of power conflicts.

It seems likely this was one of the many factors that drew the Hungarians to the Bauhaus. Prior to 1919, young followers of the avant-garde had gathered around a revolutionary core, namely the periodical *MA* (Today) launched by Lajos Kassák in Budapest, and created their so-called Activist, essentially figurative and expressive style, which found expression in numerous paintings and primarily black and white graphics. After 1920, the majority of the left-oriented artists left Hungary. Some of them either became part of the Bauhaus, or at least came into contact with its circles, but they all bore their painful historical heritage with them. This heritage was the government of Mihály Károlyi, the Michaelmas Daisy Revolution and the short lived Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919. Its fall and the subsequent repression linked to the rise of Admiral Miklós Horthy fundamentally altered the situation of artists with leftist leanings and for that matter artistic life as a whole in Hungary.

The long-term consequences of the move to the right of the regime was particularly relevant for radical intellectuals. The new concepts of form and new artistic trends and currents in Germany appealed to them, but perhaps equally appealing was the chance to distance themselves from the suffocating political atmosphere, the accompanying isolation and lack of perspective in Hungary. Whether they were painters, architects, or furniture designers, whether they created household objects or new stage settings, in Germany they must have felt that their efforts were worthwhile. There was a demand for their art, they were not working in a vacuum.

Most of the Hungarian artists who ended up in the Bauhaus were leftists and had earlier breathed the air of Activism, even if, with the exception of Sándor Bortnyik, they had not actively participated in the movement themselves. (After 1920 the artists affiliated with Activism emigrated and worked in Vienna, Berlin or Moscow, and the movement itself died out in Hungary.) Nevertheless, those who went to the Bauhaus did not necessarily have any intention of emigrating, nor did they particularly want to engage in politics. They simply wished to live and work in new surroundings. They had recognized the relevance of Bauhaus quite early and soon found their place.

Farkas Molnár and Alfréd Forbát found employment in Walter Gropius's architectural studio. As they were involved in many of Gropius' projects and their execution (the Sommerfeld house, *Monument to the March Dead),* they devoted less time to learning or teaching at the school, which was, however, directed by Gropius himself. Others, like Marcel Breuer or Andor Weininger from Pécs, moved up each rung of the ladder, from apprentice to master, following the unique Bauhaus hierarchy. This hierarchy was not obligatory: the twenty-seven year-old Moholy-Nagy entered the Bauhaus as a professor/master.

Of the members of the circle of Budapest Activists, only the painter Sándor Bortnyik was active in Weimar, and not as a member of the Bauhaus. Yet he had a number of contacts among Bauhaus artists and also knew and was influenced

by the painter Theo Van Doesburg, a member of the Dutch De Stijl Group, a Bauhaus rival. Bortnyik was thus one of the direct links between Budapest and Weimar, Hungarian Activism and German Bauhaus, and the most important mediator between Activism, Bauhaus and De Stijl. One should note that as a painter and graphic designer he took no interest in architecture, which was one of the main concerns of the Bauhaus. Bortnyik's previously expressive style changed around 1921 during his emigration. He created a type of painting he called "Pictorial Architecture," which he first published in the 1921 *Album*. Later, during his stay in Weimar, Bortnyik went beyond this system of abstract composition, painting strange, stiff figures reminiscent of mechanical puppets. They were conceived not so much in the spirit of the Bauhaus as out of the process that resulted in the distinct Bauhaus iconography: the object-like building fragments (which resemble El Lissitzky's *Proun* as well), the emphatically bleak urban environment, and the machine-puppet figures. They also share affinities with the film and stage experiments at the school and the transparent planes of Moholy-Nagy's paintings. All this constitutes a move away from the original Hungarian Activist style and the geometrism of the *Bildarchitektur,* approaching instead the German *Neue Sachlichkeit* of the 1920s.

With the exception of Sándor Bortnyik, none of the young Hungarian artists who arrived at the Bauhaus after 1920 had had much of an artistic past, beyond art school training of some sort. This explains in part why the German school meant so much to them, why their personalities and artistic and intellectual horizons took shape there. They responded with vivacity to all the influences and impressions of Weimar, including promptings that in some cases were critical of the Bauhaus such as the De Stijl seminar held by Van Doesburg in 1922 in Weimar, the very home of the Bauhaus. Van Doesburg's influence is visible in the works of Bauhaus students, but in the end his anti-Bauhaus movement failed as the post of a master, to which he had aspired, was filled by László Moholy-Nagy.

Many of the Hungarian Bauhaus artists were from the south-western town of Pécs, and several of them had known each other from early childhood. Three of them had travelled to Italy together before making it to Weimar. They formed a smaller Pécs expatriats' circle within the Bauhaus.

Of them, the architect Alfréd Forbát arrived in Weimar in August 1920, the year after the foundation of the Bauhaus. Forbát had practically no previous training in the arts and came to Weimar as a graduate of the Munich Technical College. Unlike his fellow artists, he began his career primarily not as a painter, but rather as an architect. Nevertheless, he had magnificent drawing and compositional skills, visible in his small pastel-coloured, subtly structured graphics as well as in the architectural plans and drawings he made of buildings. Forbát possessed an unusual erudition. He was at home in the cultures of antiquity, had a good command of German, and was able to adapt quickly to his new surroundings in

Germany. In September 1920, he joined Gropius's design studio and in early 1921 he participated in several major construction projects in Berlin, including the Sommerfeld house, the Stöckle house, and the Otte house. This was particularly significant given that within the Bauhaus, its Utopian ideals notwithstanding, there was no architectural training whatsoever. Therefore, instead of having to concern himself with questions of theory, Forbát was able to build on the knowledge of architecture he had acquired earlier directly under Gropius. At the same time, he maintained and even further developed his professional network. In 1921 he visited László Moholy-Nagy in Berlin and convinced others born in Pécs, like Marcel Breuer and Farkas Molnár, to join the Bauhaus in Germany.

Farkas Molnár, too, worked in Gropius's architectural practice, but he also pursued studies at the graphic workshop of the Bauhaus where, together with Henrik Stefán, his old friend from Pécs, he produced a twelve-page folder of lithographs entitled *Italia 921* in commemoration of their trip to Italy. With the exception of the cover, the folder does not bear much affinity with Bauhaus trends or geometric architecture. It rather seems to reflect the influence of a later, somewhat mannered Cubist style. In any case it clearly exemplifies the ambivalence characteristic of the Hungarian artists who were influenced by the Bauhaus.

A more playful style, somewhat naïve and more typical of the Arcadian, is alloyed to a strict, almost ascetic use of geometrical forms. Farkas Molnár's drypoints are examples of the first, more naïve and lyrical style. They were created in 1923, when Molnár was already drawing perspectives for Gropius. The two seemingly contradictory approaches still seemed equally valid to him. The figures attest to a lyrical, Arcadian mood while the Bauhaus geometrical building blocks are familiar from the architectural designs of the Gropius studio. In the series of drypoints they are placed next to each other and Molnár places equal emphasis on both. Molnár's best-known work from the period is a Utopian construction plan (never realized) of a house, the *Red Cube House Model.* With its surprising simplicity and bright, provocative red, black and white colours the design is on a par with the works of Russian Constructivists, El Lissitzky in particular.

Like Molnár, Marcel Breuer also joined the Bauhaus at the invitation of Forbát for the 1920/21 academic year, coming, furthermore, from Vienna to become a highly influential architect and furniture designer. After completing the Preliminary Course, Breuer became one of six apprentices to join the new furniture workshop in summer 1921. As he had progressed from apprentice to master, he did from painter to carpenter, and furniture designer, and later architect. Oskar Schlemmer noted that "Marcel Breuer voluntarily gave up painting (unquestionably a great sacrifice), for which he had talent, and now he is a carpenter" (Catalogue, p. 108). This sacrifice, furthermore, may very well not have been voluntary, or at least Breuer suggested as much to me in the early 1970s. According to his recollections of the Bauhaus and the mood that

prevailed among the other young men, there was no greater insult than to be told, *"Du bist ein Künstler..."*, i.e. that you are an artist. It is thus entirely understandable that students who had begun as painters and indeed had had a talent for painting sought to distance themselves from this label, preferring instead to distinguish themselves in a craft seen as functional and useful.

There is an interesting parallel between the work of the Bauhaus and events of the day in Moscow. In 1921 artists who were at the forefront of the avant-garde, like Rodchenko, Stepanova, Popova and others, declared: "The Last Painting" was done (the tryptich by Rodchenko). With that they declared the death of painting, and either gave up painting for a time, or at the very least did not show their paintings at exhibitions. Wassilly Kandinsky constituted a kind of personal link between Russian artists and the Bauhaus. He never stopped painting, however, nor did he ever support the notion of the death of the painting, at least not to my knowledge. The Bauhaus artists thus fashioned this notion independently of Kandinsky, at the same time but under very different circumstances. As far as one can tell on the basis of the surviving works, as a painter Breuer had a great deal in common with the artists of Pécs, such figures as Farkas Molnár, Hugó Johan, Henrik Stefán and Jenő Gábor, as well as the expressive style of the Activist painter Péter Dobrovics, also from Pécs.

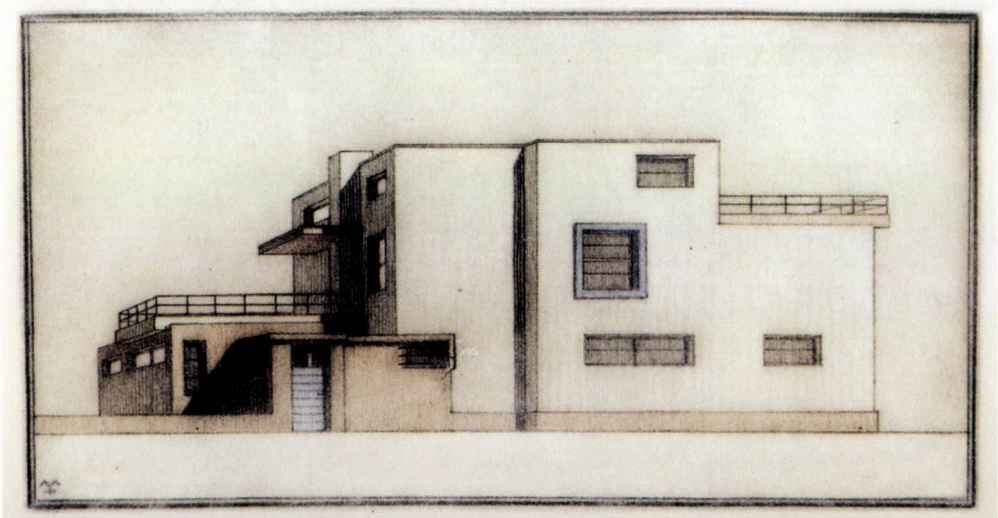
Perhaps as a painter Breuer would not have obtained the attention he later won as a furniture designer. As part of the Bauhaus, however, he proved to be a student of outstanding talent as soon as he began to study carpentry. In 1923 he created pieces of furniture of a clean and formal structure that harmonized perfectly with the Bauhaus ideal. (The large mounted mirrors on dressing tables recalled paintings by Moholy-Nagy, in particular his LIS compositions from this period.) Early masterpieces of his work as a designer cum carpenter, such as *Slatted Chair* and *African Chair,* fit in well with contemporary avant-garde, primarily De Stijl chairs. They were modern in their outlines, pictorial in their effects, and not always comfortable.

Breuer's real innovation was his trademark tubular steel furniture made of extruded nickel-plated tubular steel. Unusually light and easy to assemble from ready-made steel tubes, the chair was the result of Breuer's years of experiments bending steel and was immediately hailed as an important breakthrough in furniture design. As he explained in 1935 in the Budapest journal *Est,* "I invented the first tubular steel furniture in 1925, when I decided to learn how to ride a bike. I bought a bike and the idea of a tubular structure struck me on the spot. It was the handle bar that gave me the first prompting, a slender but simple, light piece of pipe." This new invention was neither easy to produce, nor was it easy to persuade people to accept it. When I met Breuer in 1970 he still remembered the occasion on which his stunning chairs were first exhibited. Visitors to the exhibition were so outraged that they smashed and destroyed them. Later he attempted to design chairs for mass production out of standard materials and

Sándor Bortnyik: *The New Adam,* 1924, oil on canvas, 48 × 36 cm
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

Sándor Bortnyik: *The New Eve,* 1924, oil on canvas, 48 × 35 cm
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

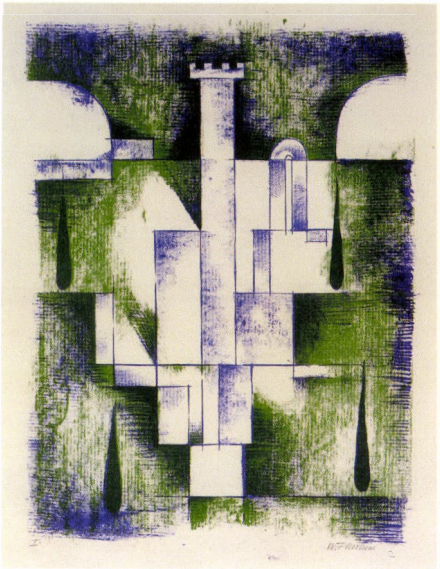
Walter Gropius–Alfréd Forbát: *Detached Houses,* 1922, model, reconstruction by Margit Pelényi & Miklós Szabó, 2009
Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs
Photograph by Gábor Rosch



Alfréd Forbát: *Design for a Semi-detached House, perspective,* 1923, crayon on paper, 172 × 312 mm
Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest

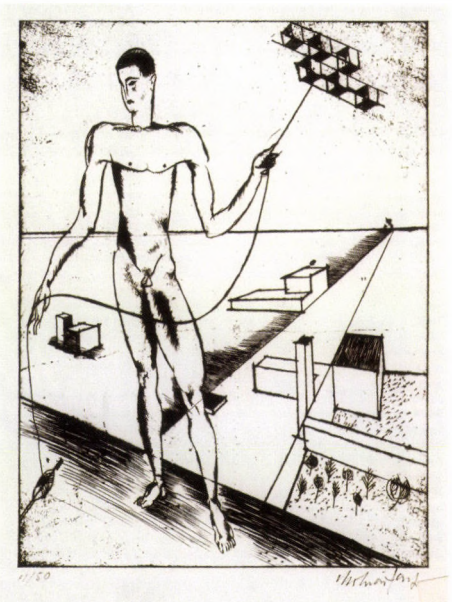
Marcel Breuer:
Dresser with mirror, 1923,
Stiftung Bauhaus, Dessau
Interior
Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs
Photograph by Gábor Rosch

Marcel Breuer:
Steel tubular chairs,
B1, B9, B11, 1926–1930
Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest

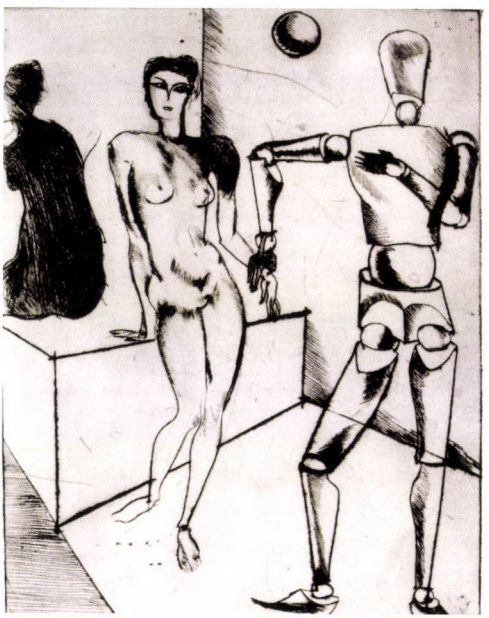


Farkas Molnár: *Italia (Fiorentia),* Italia portfolio I, 1922, hand-coloured lithography on paper, 439 × 336 mm
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

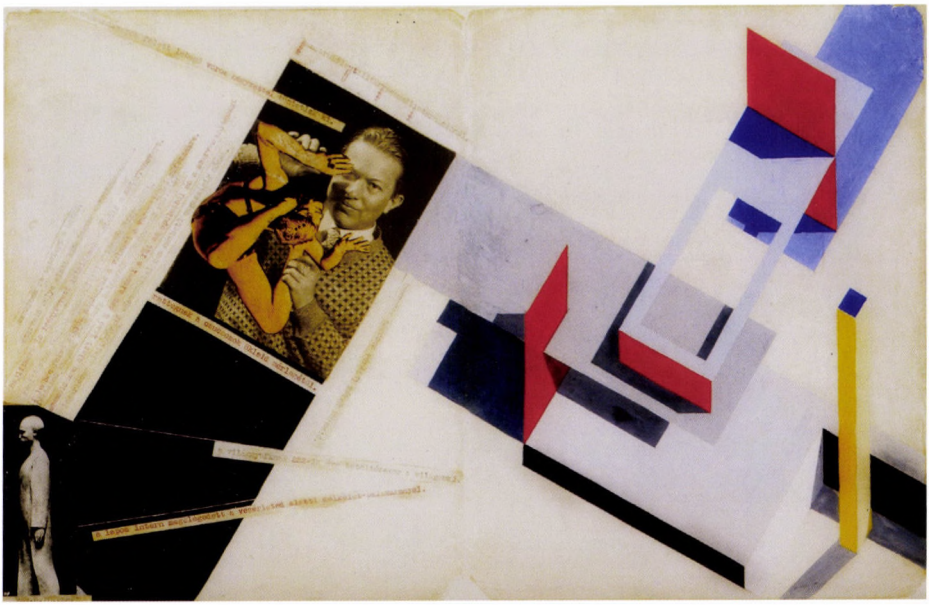
Farkas Molnár: *Lovers,* 1923, Dry point on paper, 245 × 195 mm
Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs



Farkas Molnár: *Boy with Air Toy (Kite-flyer),* 1923, Dry point on paper, crayon, 200 × 150 mm
Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs

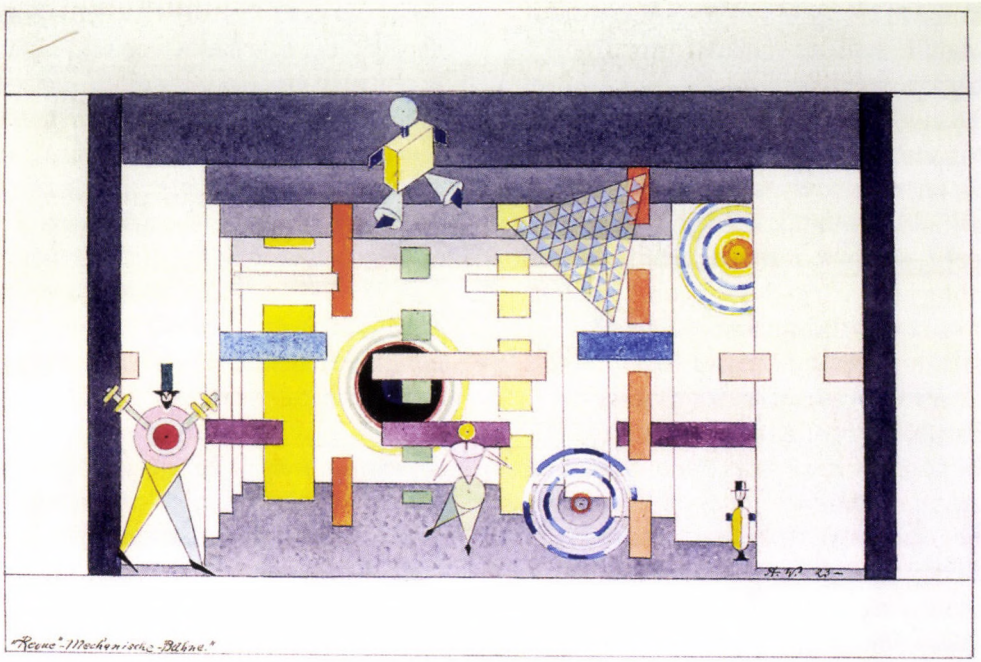


Farkas Molnár: *The Mechanical Man Seduces the Woman,* 1923, Dry point on paper, 198 × 148 mm
Private property

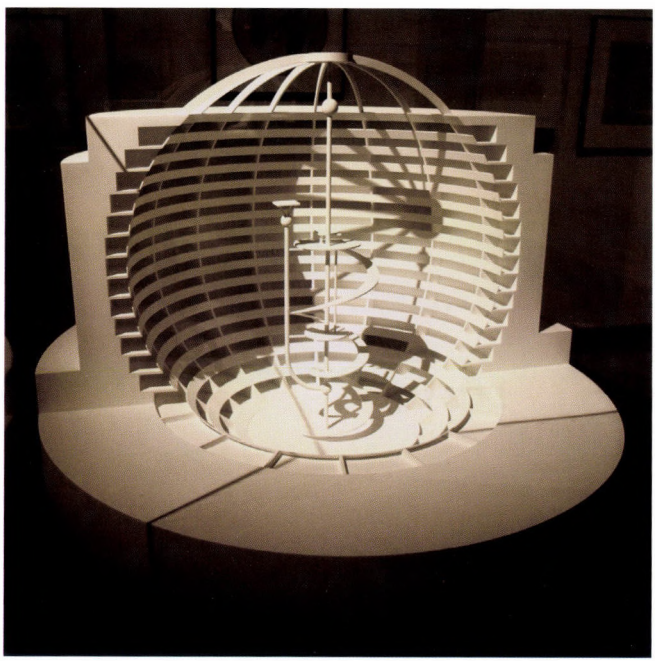


Farkas Molnár: *KURI collage with self-portrait,* 1929, collage, oil on paper, 33 × 50 cm
Kassák Museum of the Petőfi Museum of Literature, Budapest

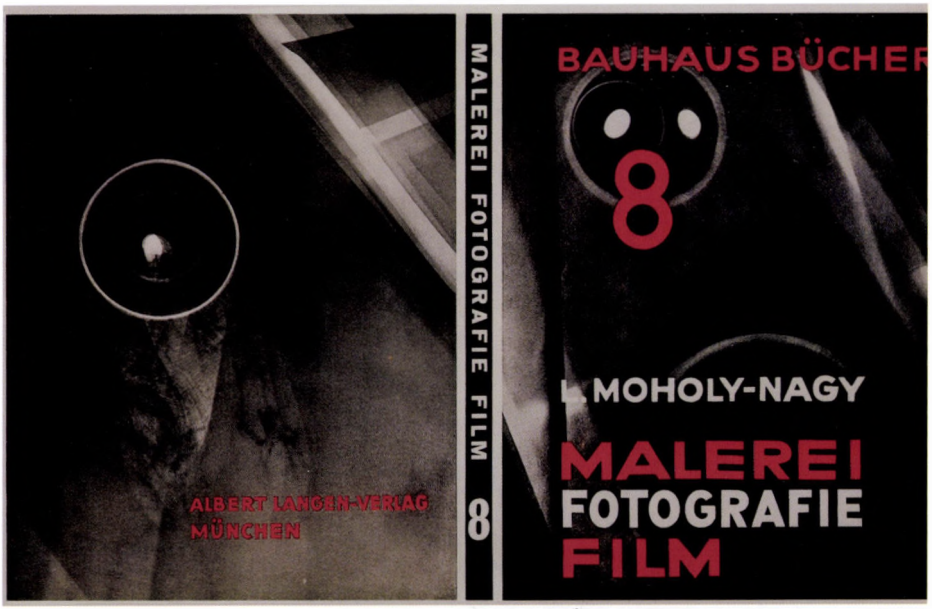
Farkas Molnár: *Red Cube House Model,* 1922–23,
reconstruction by Margit Pelényi & Miklós Szabó, 2009
Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs
Photograph by Gábor Rosch



Andor Weininger: *Mechanical Stage – Abstract Revue,* after 1923, pencil on paper, watercolour, 290 × 361 mm
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest



Andor Weininger:
Globe Theatre Design, 1926, model
177.5 × 177 cm, reconstruction by
Margit Pelényi & Miklós Szabó,
2009
Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs
Photograph by Gábor Rosch



László Moholy-Nagy:
Bauhaus book covers:

Malerei, Photographie, Film, 1925;

Bauhausbücher 14, leaflet, 1929;

Walter Gropius:
Bauhaus bauten Dessau, 1930

Lajos Kassák: Design for the cover of *MA Ungarische Gruppe*
by Lajos Kassák–Ernő Kállai, Bauhausbücher 18, 1924, paper, 295 × 210 mm.
Print, *Magyar Grafika,* Nos. 5–6, 1928

comfortable and stable furnishings which would create a cheerful interior living space with their vivid colours, red, blue, and occasionally black.

Beuer presumably began to take an increasing interest in architecture following the success of the Bauhaus exhibition in the summer of 1923. In 1924 he was already working with Farkas Molnár and Adolf Meyer on the plans for the *Haus am Horn,* built for a Bauhaus exhibition running from July through September 1923. Designed by Georg Muche, a painter and a teacher at the Bauhaus, each room had furniture and fittings designed by and created in the Bauhaus workshops. Breuer, a student at the time, designed furniture, including the built-in cupboards which were published in 1925 as Vol. 3 of *Bauhausbücher.* In the years to follow he devoted himself primarily to architecture.

Hugó Johan, Farkas Molnár, Henrik Stefán and Andor Weininger, the young artists who—following Alfréd Forbát and Marcel Breuer—also left Pécs to join the Bauhaus, drew inspiration from Activism as well. As the latter claimed in 1921 in Pécs:

> After we had handed in our applications to the Bauhaus and were waiting for a reply, Molnár, Stefán and I began to work with more enthusiasm. One day the door opened and a stranger came in with a portfolio under his arm. He told us his name was Breuer and he had come home from the Bauhaus to spend his holidays. In this way we gained first-hand information. He showed us the drawings and paintings that he had done in Itten's class. It was all abstract work; we in Pécs had always worked with a model. It was all a riddle to us: we simply did not know what abstraction was, how we could get there, how we could learn it, what in the world it was... In Pécs our studies had been based upon naturalism and realism.[4]

Weininger was one of the most cheerful and popular figures at the Bauhaus. Along with his friends from Pécs, he decided in 1921 to enroll for the autumn semester. After taking the entrance exam he attended Itten's Preliminary Course and a painting workshop taught by Kandinsky. However, it was not Kandinsky so much as Van Doesburg whose ideas influenced Weininger and the other Hungarians. The importance to them of his views found expression in their KURI Manifesto, which was published in the Novi Sad periodical *ÚT* (The Road) in April 1923. "At last there will be the mechanical picture, moving plastic art, and, to end all, architecture that can vary place and form. Movement will at last find its place untransposed in hitherto static art...."[5] The mechanical picture as a theoretical formulation of mobile art found form in various experimental art objects by Weininger. The stage designs for the *Mechanical Stage—Abstract Revue* fit well into the series of Bauhaus mechanical ballet

4 ■ Éva Bajkay, *Andor Weininger.* Pécs: Pannonia Könyvek, 2006, p. 36.
5 ■ *idem,* p. 44.

performances in which the actors were transfigured from normal into geometric shapes. Another work by Weininger is his 1926 design for a Globe Theatre. The simple, eminently practical spherical form is expressive of an unusually audacious concept, even in the context of the contemporary avant-garde theatre models. Of course neither Weininger's plan nor the visions of the others (such as Gropius's *Totaltheater* or Farkas Molnár's U-Theatre, etc.) were to be realized, not even in the coming decades. In the meantime, however, Weininger actively participated, with great success, in the theatre directed by Oskar Schlemmer as a member of the Jazz band.

The year 1923 witnessed the explosive entrance on the scene of another great Hungarian artist, László Moholy-Nagy, who started a new era. Moholy-Nagy joined the Bauhaus as a Master with hardly any academic training. Before his emigration, he had been a pupil in Róbert Berény's private art school and had known members of the circle around Kassák's *MA*. He thereby had been exposed to some of the modernist ideas. In December 1919, he moved first to Vienna and then to Berlin for a longer stay, finding himself right at the centre of a turbulent international avant-garde movement. As a result his earlier figurative style was displaced by a new style lying somewhere on the borderline between Dada and Constructivism. He came into contact with members of Der Sturm and had shows in the Der Sturm gallery in Berlin. He also served as the Berlin editor of *MA,* which in the meantime had been re-launched in Vienna. Gropius had immediately recognized Moholy-Nagy's gifts, and the Der Sturm exhibitions caught his eye as well. After Johannes Itten left, he chose Moholy-Nagy from a pool of several other nominees to replace him.

Moholy-Nagy directed the Preliminary Course, together with Josef Albers, and later the metal workshop, where between 1921 and 1923 the Hungarian Gyula Pap had studied and created his elegant metal bowls and slender floor lamps. Moholy-Nagy's endeavours were far reaching, as Itten's had been, and were not limited to the workshops in which he taught. In his studio he passed the mornings painting, this being perhaps his most productive period as a painter, as reflected in his mature, abstract style. He created photograms, photomontages, photo-plastiques and wrote several books as part of the Bauhaus series, which he also edited (along with Gropius), assuming most of the responsibility for their lay-out and typography. His personality embodied the new idea of the Bauhaus: the versatile master with international ties, a Constructivist approach and diverse interests: he danced the Hungarian *csárdás* with his students, made short film sketches, designed sets for the stage, and formulated the latest avant-garde theories. He stayed with the Bauhaus until 1928. When Gropius resigned as director and left the school, Moholy-Nagy also left and for a time carried on working in Berlin. No other personage in the Bauhaus ever quite managed to compensate for the loss of a figure of such astonishing inventiveness and such a wide variety of interests.

Until now, the artists from Pécs have been mentioned primarily in scholarly works (essays, catalogues, and more recently in the Pannónia book series published in Pécs[6]). The introduction of the work of these artists to a wider public is perhaps one of the more interesting aspects of the current exhibition. While their approach may not always reflect the dominant and distinctive features of the Bauhaus, their contribution was substantial and their original concepts and ideas enriched the Bauhaus scene.

Among the surprises awaiting the museum goer, the work of István Sebők in architecture and theatre design, which has been undeservedly neglected for some time, deserves special emphasis. Sebők was trained not as an artist but rather as an engineer at the Sachsische Technische Hochschule in Dresden. After architectural and landscape sketches, he came up in 1927 with his diploma work, the design for a *Tanz-Theater für Dresden*, the fundamental novelty of which was that it deconstructed the sharp dividing line between the *Guckkastenbühne* or proscenium stage and the audience. It was also in 1927 that Walter Gropius asked Sebők to participate in work on the plans for a *Totaltheater* for Erwin Piscator. He moved to the Dessau headquarters of the Bauhaus, where Gropius introduced the so called *Raumbühne* or "space stage" to Piscator, an ensemble of three stage segments on which performances can be held separately or at the same time. Some 2,000 swivel chairs were planned for the audience. Sebők designed a unique dome with a metal frame *(Netzwerkkuppel)*. The concave screen and the canvases were intended to function as surfaces for the projection of still or motion pictures. It was given the name *Totaltheather* after the way in which the spectacle of the performance or film spread to cover everything. They did not, however, have the financial resources to realize their plans. Sebők continued to work with Gropius as well as Moholy-Nagy, but primarily only after all three had left the Bauhaus.

As the exhibition clearly demonstrates, the Hungarian artists did not work in a vacuum, but rather developed their ideas in the company of the Bauhaus masters. Sometimes harmony prevailed, sometimes rivalry, and this intricate network of relationships is described in numerous documents, memoirs and letters. Éva Bajkay has made good use of these records, thoroughly researching sources in Hungary, but also sources in Germany, first and foremost the Bauhaus Archive in Berlin. György Várkonyi focused primarily on the Pécs circle and their work. The two approaches, which indeed are complementary, form a synthesis in both the Hungarian and the German Catalogues, which will be indispensable resources for scholars of the history of Hungarian and German art of the 20th century. ❧

6 ■ See note 3.

Remembering Bartók

John Moseley Talks with Elisabeth Klein

Bartók Remembered—this is the title given to an important collection of testimonies by the composer's contemporaries, extending from family members and the inner circle of friends to pupils and occasional acquaintances.[1] The German translation of the book tries to make the point even more obvious in the combined form of title-cum-subtitle, *Béla Bartók im Spiegel seiner Zeit: Portraitiert von Zeitgenossen.*[2] Both are, of course, series titles rather than the author's own choice. A Hungarian "forerunner" to the English-language volume, *Így láttuk Bartókot,* "this is how we saw Bartók," although relegating the actual present of remembering to the subtitle ("recollections"), also emphasizes the unavoidably subjective nature of recollection.[3] Remembering is not only subjective but also occasional and is often defined and influenced by circumstances. Despite this, the main interest lies in the past conjured up by memory.

Publishing an edited version of his conversations with the pianist Elisabeth Klein, the British composer John Moseley provides us with a surprising new testimony. It is surprising both because of its source, Bartók's previously unregistered private piano pupil, and because of its content, a few snapshots

1 ■ Malcolm Gillies, *Bartók Remembered*. London: Faber and Faber, 1990.
2 ■ Zürich and St. Gallen: M & T Verlag AG, 1991.
3 ■ Ferenc Bónis (ed.), *Így láttuk Bartókot: Harminchat emlékezés* [This Is How We Saw Bartók: thirty-six recollections]. Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1981.

John Moseley
is a composer. He is Chairman of the Concerts Society of Christ the King the Metropolitan Cathedral, Liverpool. He was responsible for organising the last recital of Elisabeth Klein.

László Vikárius
directs the Bartók Archives of the Institute for Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and lectures at the Liszt University of Music in Budapest.

or perhaps rather sketches from a period of the composer's life rarely observed from such closeness with such a critical eye.[4] Elisabeth Klein, who appears as "Klein Erzsébet" in yearbooks of the Music Academy in Budapest between 1930 and 1934, obviously studied with Bartók privately from 1934 when such pianists also attended private piano classes held in the composer's home as the Hungarian György Sándor (1912–2005), or the American Storm Bull (1913–2007).[5]

Although the publication is intended as a tribute to the pianist Klein, and the conversation did include a number of details of her life and career, the true central subject for both interviewee and interviewer was Bartók, and it will undoubtedly be so for the general reader as well. This is why it seemed appropriate to add a number of notes to this interesting personal recollection regarding particular details of Bartók's life. While the interview is a genuine document, it does contain a number of confusions and inaccuracies which need correction. Some of my comments of course only serve to strengthen the information value of something mentioned by Klein. The notes are thus intended to make this testimony by a nonagenarian of remarkable vividness of mind a fully reliable source on Bartók's life and personality.

László Vikárius

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The life of Elisabeth Klein (1911–2004) stretched from the Austro-Hungarian Empire of the Habsburgs through the inter-war years of the Horthy regime, isolation, then marriage, in Denmark during the Second World War, where due to her husband's political affiliation with Great Britain she was hunted by the Nazis onto a successful career as pianist and teacher mainly in Scandinavia. She specialised in the 20th-century repertoire being particularly noted for her performances of Bartók, the Second Viennese School, contemporary Scandinavian composers, of which she gave many premieres, Boulez, Stockhausen and Berio. Much of this repertoire was recorded. She performed widely in Europe, the USA, the Middle East and China. Towards the end of her life she settled in England with her son, the George Holt Professor of Physiology in the University of Liverpool, and his family. This was when I met her. The following article is an amalgam of several conversations which took place during the last 18 months of her life. She gave her final recital at the Metropolitan Cathedral, Liverpool a few months before her

4 ■ The most intimate and informative, albeit understandably emotionally charged, recollection of the composer in the 1930s is Peter Bartók's *My Father.* Homosassa, Florida: Bartók Records, 2002.
5 ■ A list of Bartók's piano pupils appears in János Demény, "Bartók und die Musikakademie," *Studia Musicologica,* vol. 23 (1981), pp. 459–76. Some of the more important private pupils are mentioned in Malcolm Gillies, "Bartók as Pedagogue," in *Studies in Music,* No. 24 (1991), pp. 64–86. The most detailed account of Bartók's teaching appears in Júlia Székely's full-length recollections, *Mein Lehrer Béla Bartók.* Trans. Ruth Futaky, München: Ungarisches Institut, 1995. Székely studied with Bartók officially from 1923 to 1926.

death. She chose late Liszt and Bartók and ended with 'The Night's Music' from the suite Out of Doors. *I was present and like others in the audience, was astonished by the accuracy, vigour and detail of her playing.*

Like many musicians from Mitteleuropa, *dislocated by improbable circumstance, Elisabeth Klein's career developed despite of—and partly because of—the ever-changing political situation. The rigorous training she received at the Liszt Academy and with Bartók laid the foundation for a long career in which her aim was to play objectively, with a minimum of subjective interpretation. Short and slight, a gracious hostess, fluent in several languages, determined, even wilful, she, nevertheless, retained the charm and manner of her upbringing. She was a vivid and candid talker who knew exactly what she wanted to say. There were no hesitations or fanciful imaginings. Her conversation, like her playing, was objective. Such objectivity offered, perhaps, security in a changing world, for I sensed, below the calm and dignified surface, a woman of strong emotions. In this, she reflected her teacher, Bartók.*

John Moseley

John Moseley: *You have had a long and extraordinary life. Would you please tell us something about your early years?*

Elisabeth Klein: Because of my association with Bartók many people think of me as a specifically Hungarian musician. However, I was born in 1911 in Trenčín (Trencsény), which is now in Slovakia and was then part of Greater Hungary, which belonged to the Habsburg Dual Monarchy. In fact my father, whose mother was a baroness, was Austrian, having been born in Bratislava (Pressburg/Pozsony), although the family originated from the Graz area. When I was three, we moved to Budapest and lived in the Fasor, known as the street with many churches. My father was not religious, but both my sister and I went to a Roman Catholic school, this being the state religion. Later, my father allowed us to choose which church we went to and we chose the Unitarian[6]. My home life was happy and prosperous, but I do recall that in the Budapest of the '20s and '30s ordinary workers dropped in the street through hunger. It was an upper-middle-class household with servants, of course, and a governess for my sister and myself. We were always chaperoned to and from school. I attended the Maria Theresia Gymnasium, which was about five minutes walk from the Oktogon. We wore a uniform that included a hat on which silver symbols denoted our year: 1, 2, 3 etc. up to 8. It was a strict and thorough education, including eight hours of Latin per week. Each day began with the pupils standing to sing the National Anthem. Folk songs were not taught. My young years coincided with the demise of the Dual Monarchy. I certainly felt more Austrian than Hungarian and recall seeing the Emperor Karl drive past in his carriage. He wore military uniform.

6 ■ As a potentially interesting coincidence, Bartók himself chose the Unitarian Church.

People criticised the Habsburgs, especially the Empress Zita, but were sorry when they were deposed. Bartók, who was said to be a Communist, did not approve of them.[7] Like me, he would probably have known that, in the 1930s, Friday was designated "Beggars' Day". Perhaps 60 per cent of people were barely literate.

Please tell us about your early musical experiences.

I recall going to services at the Matthias Church in Buda. There was a first-class choir which performed the Haydn and Mozart masses. My sister, who was eight years older than me, was already playing Beethoven sonatas by the time I started piano lessons aged five. I found that I could play some of these movements by ear and seemed to have been born with a great technical facility. I enrolled at the Conservatoire where my studies ran parallel with those at school. The Conservatoire course consisted of four years in the Beginner's section, although I could already read music when I entered; four years in the Intermediate, then four years in the Higher. After each section there was an examination. As with school, we received a very thorough grounding. We really concentrated on our work: there was little time for anything else. Even in my final years there I was still chaperoned. One girl was dismissed for being seen arm-in-arm with a boy. Then a choice had to be made between the pedagogic and the artistic routes. My father wanted me to take the former, which I did, because this would lead to the security of the teaching profession, but I took the artistic course as well. At the end of 1934 I graduated and gave a recital in the Academy. My programme was Bach's Toccata and Fugue in C major, Beethoven's *Appassionata* Sonata, Liszt's *Mephisto* Waltz, and *Dante* Sonata and Debussy's *Feu d'artifice.*

Were you not taught by Bartók at this time?

No. Bartók came to this graduate recital—he was then in his last year at the Academy[8]—and said that although my playing was too romantic, he would teach me privately in his home. He did this in weekly lessons with two other pianists, György Sándor[9] and Pál Fejér[10]. Both were Jewish. Sándor escaped to

7 ■ Bartók's aversion towards the ruling Habsburgs from his "patriotic" period in 1903 on is well documented. He also sympathized with the left-wing Hungarian Soviet Republic for a short time, also accepting membership of the Musical Directorate, but he became disillusioned rather quickly.

8 ■ After Ernst von Dohnányi had been appointed director of the Music Academy in 1934, Bartók sought and found relief from his teaching duties being, at his own wish, appointed to the Academy of Sciences to prepare for edition the complete collection of Hungarian folk songs.

9 ■ György Sándor was one of Bartók's best-known pupils, who studied with him privately from 1930 and later at the Music Academy between 1931 and 1933 and remained in contact with the composer during his later years including his American exile. He gave the first performance of Bartók's Third Piano Concerto in 1946. Cf. his recollections in Bónis, *Így láttuk Bartókot,* pp.187–94.

10 ■ Little is known about Pál Fejér. His name appears among piano students in the yearbooks of the Music Academy in Budapest between 1929 and 1932.

the USA and made a big career but Fejér, who was the most talented of us, disappeared during the war. The very best pupils, such as Annie Fischer, went not to Bartók but to Dohnányi, the Director of the Academy.

What form did these lessons take?

We went to his home at the appointed time. In his study were two pianos: he sat at one and we at the other, taking it in turn to play for him. At the first mistake we had to stop and the next person continued. Everything had to be by heart and we had to work very hard before each lesson. Bartók felt that I had a good technique, but that I was not musically ready for a career. I thought that I had given my all and was very disappointed. In retrospect I think he was right. I never questioned his methods even though he made very few comments and never about technical problems. He expected a fine technique already. I once asked about a particular fingering and he replied "Use your nose if you like." Teaching brought in an income—he was paid monthly in cash left in an envelope—but I don't think he enjoyed it. His fees were modest but they assured a reasonable standard of living then. Sheet music, scores, books were all cheap. Food, wine and clothes also. Workers had very low wages. So Bartók was not badly off but never as prosperous as he wished. His final house in Buda, now the Bartók Museum, was rented. Even his pianos were rented.[11]

What sort of repertoire did you study?

Scarlatti, Couperin, Bach.[12] He possessed a profound understanding of the Forty-eight Preludes and Fuges. The Preludes he thought lacked substance, but he could make a speech about each of the fugues. In this way he made me look at Bach with new eyes: he expected strict tempos and no pedal. He considered my Bach playing to be undisciplined, by which he meant over-romanticised.

This is interesting because his editions of Baroque composers are heavily romanticised, with octave doublings and very many indications of tempo, dynamics, accents, staccatos and so on. In this they resemble Kabalevsky's editions of Bach.

He did the Bach "48" edition for money.[13] The markings are very romantic and he wanted us to observe them, so there is a contradiction here. His own playing of them brought out all the parts clearly, but he never performed them in concerts. It is obvious that he took a lot of trouble with his editing. Just as in his own work,

11 ■ Of the three pianos in the house, Ditta Pásztory only mentions a Bechstein piano as rented. Two Bösendorfer pianos, a grand and a smaller one must have been Bartók's own, as they are still kept in their two separate locations, the Institute of Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Bartók Memorial House. See *Béla Bartók Memorial House,* ed. Máté Hollós, Budapest: Berki Press Bt., 2006, 12.

12 ■ Bartók indeed taught and edited the music of all three composers.

13 ■ Bartók's edition of the Well-tempered Clavier, prepared in 1907–1908 for Károly Rozsnyai's publishing house, is still in use in the Editio Musica Budapest reprint.

there are many detailed markings. He added tempi, pauses and even doublings as in the final twelve bars of the E-flat Fugue from Book II. The effect is rather like Liszt, whose music had a direct effect on his early style. Even his interpretations of his own music do not always follow his intentions as set out in his scores.

Yes, The recorded sound may be primitive, but he clearly uses more rubato *than is indicated and performances of the same piece differ.*[14]

This may reflect his background as a student and his early interest in the music of Liszt, Debussy and Richard Strauss. He was trained as a virtuoso at a time when *rubato* was the norm, but he moved away from such romanticism to something much stricter and ascetic.

Was he frustrated by the imprecisions of conventional notation?

His experience of notating folk music made him acutely aware of such constraints, which led to experimentation, as in the use of harmonics in *Mikrokosmos*.

In regard to folk music Grieg had, rather unexpectedly, an influence on him.

He met Grieg in the early 1900s.[15] He played. Grieg was good to him and showed him some of the pieces he was working on that were based on Norwegian folk tunes. Bartók took to the idea and mentioned it to Kodály, who showed him how to transcribe.[16] From then on it was a consuming interest, though not confined to Europe. There is an Angolian[17] influence in the 3rd movement of the Suite op. 14—it has to be played very lightly. The first movement is about soldiers.[18]

Did Bartók teach you any of his own music?

I think that was why he took us on as pupils. He wanted pianists of good technique who could be moulded to play his music in the way he wanted. We would therefore be a new generation to carry his music forward, especially if we performed abroad. Nevertheless, he said nothing about his own music in

14 ■ All known recordings of Bartók's piano performances are available in the two CD albums *Bartók at the Piano* and *Bartók Recordings from Private Collections* on the Hungaroton label (HCD 12326–31 and HCD 12334–35).

15 ■ No early acquaintance between Bartók and Grieg has been documented, although Bartók was aware of the Norwegian composer's interest in folklore in 1910 when he purchased some of his works based on folk melodies. Cf. Vera Lampert, " 'Grieg Has To Be Taken Seriously': The Influence of Grieg's Music on Béla Bartók's *For Children*", paper presented at the International Edward Grieg Society Conference in Berlin on 14 May 2009, see http://www.griegsociety.org/ (accessed on 22 November 2010).

16 ■ Whereas Bartók's earliest notation of folk songs in 1904 predates his first meeting with Zoltán Kodály in March 1905, he did indeed seek the latter's advice on a scholarly approach to the collection of folk music.

17 ■ The third movement of Suite op. 14 (1916) shows Algerian (rather than "Angolian") influence originating in Bartók's collecting trip to Biskra and the surrounding area in 1913.

18 ■ Although the Suite for Piano was composed during the First World War, no such interpretation of the first movement's character is known from any other source.

the first lesson, but I asked if I could learn the Suite op. 14 and he agreed. I was frequently stopped, several times in each bar. His concerns were not so much about touch, but about tempo, which had to be very strict, and about overall structure. He took no fee for these lessons, and it may seem bad of me to say so, but I don't think he was a good teacher. He had little imagination to consider the individual. He wouldn't discuss his music, but told us what to do. He rarely played himself, but sometimes he did demonstrate, particularly the Bach fugues.

Was he a very good pianist?

I thought he played the early Beethoven sonatas better than anyone, particularly the outer movements. They were very rhythmic, with hardly any pedal. His Chopin I thought was not so good, being too inflexible. He performed some of the Seven Piano Pieces of Kodály and certain of his own compositions, mainly the more approachable ones, such as *Evening in the Village*. He had a clear, rather hard touch. Although he was small, his hands were very large—he had a stretch of eleven notes—and powerful. Dohnányi was a more poetic player and far better known.

Nevertheless, Bartók was an eminent figure. Were you in awe of him?

Of course. He was rather frightening: arrogant, very moody and unpredictable. I think he was unhappy. He didn't get on with Dohnányi, the Director of the Conservatoire, and he worried about the political situation. Kodály was more approachable and flexible. Hubay also was very friendly.

Bartók was a man of principle?

Certainly. He was in prison just after the First World War for a fortnight, because of his left-wing sympathies.[19] Nearly twenty years later, when he was sent official documents asking if he was Jewish or of Jewish extraction, he put on them "We are all Jews."[20] For his twenty-fifth anniversary as a composer, the state wanted

19 ■ Despite his involvement with the Musical Directorate, in contrast to Kodály, Bartók was not harassed after the fall of the Communist regime in 1919, see the composer's letter of 23 October 1919 and József Ujfalussy (ed.), *Dokumentumok a Magyar Tanácsköztársaság zenei életéből* [Documents about Musical Life during the Hungarian Soviet Republic]. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1973, pp. 624–25.

20 ■ In fact, Bartók privately commented on the questionnaire in his communication of 13 April 1938 to Mme Müller-Widmann: "I received the notorious questionnaire about grandfathers, etc., then: 'Are you of German blood, of kindred race, or non-Aryan?' Naturally neither I nor Kodály will fill in the form: our opinion is that such questions are wrong and illegal. Actually it's rather a pity, for we could give answers that would make fun of them; e.g. we could say that we are *non*-Aryans —because (according to my lexicon) in the last analysis 'Aryan' means 'Indo-European'; we Hungarians are Finno-Ugrians, or ethnically, we might possibly be northern Turks, that is we are a non-Indo-European people, and consequently non-Aryans... " See János Demény (ed.), *Béla Bartók Letters.* trans. Péter Balabán and István Farkas. Budapest: Corvina Press, 1971, p. 268.

to give him a medal and quite a large sum of money. This was considered a big honour, but he would not accept them and even wrote to the newspapers telling them that he would not accept anything from that particular government. He was against Hitler, and it became increasingly clear that he would have to leave Hungary, although he was always expected to return. With him black was always black and white always white. Once he'd made a decision, nothing would deflect him. Yes, he was difficult and, unlike Kodály, politically naive. Did he, I wonder, consider sufficiently the consequences of his words and actions or lack of them?

This is curious because I think you said that he failed to help László Halmos, the second violinist in the Hungarian Quartet yet he clearly had sympathy for his Jewish colleagues?

In 1938 the Jews had their passports taken away. Halmos, being Jewish, had to leave the Quartet and wasn't allowed out of Hungary because he had no passport. It was an awful situation not only for Halmos but for the Quartet, because they couldn't leave Hungary. He, (Halmos), was replaced by Székely and Sándor Végh left the Quartet because of this. We felt that Bartók could have done more to help Halmos, who died in the war.

How did you come to know the Quartet?

Bartók invited me to listen to them rehearsing his Fifth Quartet, which they did for many days from 8:00 in the morning to 2:00 p.m. The first performance had been in the USA with the Kolisch Quartet but Bartók wasn't very happy with it.[21] He asked the Hungarians to learn it for the ISCM Festival in Barcelona in 1936.[22] They were men in their twenties, and as with me he felt he could mould them into giving the performance exactly as he wanted it to be.

Was Bartók's manner different during those rehearsals than it had been during your lessons with him?

I sat in a corner (as small as could be), and suddenly he was a normal man who could make us all laugh. Although he knew exactly what he wanted, he was more at ease. The same was true when I played the Violin Sonata with Halmos before he left the Quartet. Bartók was such a strong character one didn't question his opinion, but we did see the other side of him. I don't think he was always right and it took me twenty years to shake off his influence.

21 ■ The Fifth String Quartet was premiered on 8 April 1935 in Washington by the Kolisch Quartet. Although Bartók corresponded with the first violinist Rudolph Kolisch on performance issues, he could not attend the première or the Quartet's rehearsals.

22 ■ The New Hungarian String Quartet (then Sándor Végh, László Halmos, Dénes Koromzay and Vilmos Palotai) performed the Fifth String Quartet on 21 April 1936 in Barcelona but before that they had already played the piece in Vienna and Budapest. The rehearsals coached by Bartók are also recalled in Claude Kenneson, *Székely and Bartók: The Story of a Friendship.* Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1994, p. 169.

Photographs show him to be a very conventional man.

Yes, externally. He was a small man, always very smartly and formally dressed, in a waistcoat even in hot weather. However, in his personal life he was somewhat unusual. When he lived on the Hill of Roses in Buda, a neighbour asked him to give his two boys piano lessons. Bartók was not keen so he passed them over to me. They were in their mid- to late teens and not really interested, so disciplining them was difficult, especially since I was not much older than they. On one occasion the elder boy kept looking out of the window and motioning me to join him. There was Bartók and his family completely naked, a not infrequent circumstance that caused bad relations with his neighbours. The police were summoned, but Bartók talked his way out of it and continued as before.[23] He had a need for the untouched in everything. He loved the pure songs from the villages which were not destroyed by city or Gypsy music. Such music was natural and pure, like nudity and the affection of young girls. He was very interested in young girls; his first wife was only sixteen when they married.[24] An affair with a fifteen-year-old girl is now known about. She wrote the words to four of the Five Songs for Voice and Piano.[25] Aware of the potential scandal, Bartók claimed that he had written the texts himself.[26] Rumours spread. This resulted in the break-up of the marriage. Bartók sent his wife back to her home territory of Transylvania with his son Béla. She stayed two weeks and was told not to return. It was very cruel. He divorced her.[27] This pattern of relationships continued with his second wife, Ditta (Pásztory) who was in her early twenties and he in his fifties when they married.[28] I recall her telling me of the circumstances of their marriage. Like myself, she was a piano pupil of Bartók's. Her lesson was the last of the day and one evening Bartók asked to walk her home. He said nothing at all until they reached her door when, without warning, he asked her to marry him. He gave her three days to make up her

23 ■ Following Kodály's advice Bartók was indeed an adherent of "the natural way of life" and even visited a summer resort at Waidberg, Switzerland, in 1911, an event documented in the poet and author Béla Balázs's diary, see Balázs, *Napló* [Diary]. 2 vols, ed. Anna Fábri, Budapest: Magvető, 1982, vol. 1, pp. 509–13.

24 ■ Bartók married his first wife Márta Ziegler (1893–1967) in 1909.

25 ■ About Klára Gombossy, whose poems were set in the op. 15 Songs (1916), see Denijs Dille, "L'Opus 15 de Béla Bartók" in id., *Béla Bartók: Regard sur le passé,* ed. Yves Lenoir. Louvain-la-Neuve: Institut supérieur d'archéologie et d'histoire de l'art Collège Érasme, 1990, pp. 257–78 and Kenneth Chalmers, *Béla Bartók.* London: Phaidon Press, 1995, pp. 107–110.

26 ■ Bartók's authorship was only claimed by later research, see Ivan Waldbauer's Introduction to his edition of the op. 15 songs, Universal Edition No. 13150L. London, 1961.

27 ■ Whatever crisis the Gombossy episode might have created in the composer's private life, his marriage did not break up in 1916. Bartók and Márta Ziegler divorced in June 1923 after Bartók had fallen in love with his piano pupil Ditta Pásztory, whom he married later that year. According to Bartók's letter of 13 August 1923, it was Ziegler who generously suggested that that they should divorce.

28 ■ Ditta Pásztory (1903–1982) was not yet 20 and Bartók (1881–1945) was 42 when they married in 1923.

mind. She was totally flabbergasted but very proud of the invitation so she agreed. Somehow he acquired a special licence which enabled them to be married within one week.[29]

This seems an extraordinary way to begin a marriage.

Sadly it was probably not a happy one. He continued his previous routine into which she had to fit and this was his pattern with his first wife, also. Neither were equal partnerships. He presumably chose young women because they could be controlled in the same way that he moulded his pupils. Nevertheless, because she did as she was told she provided an anchor for him. My view is that she was rather a weak woman. When she was in America she never learned any English. After Bartók died she returned to Hungary and the life she had known. She only played in two piano recitals with Bartók, who arranged some of his music for themselves to play. Although he wrote the Third Piano Concerto for her, with her technique in mind, she never played it.[30] However, back in Hungary she did make an LP of a selection from the *Mikrokosmos*. Bartók adored only his mother. No other woman could compete with her.

Is it true that both he and Kodály wanted to marry the same woman?

Yes, This was Emma Schlesinger, who was rich but not in my opinion very pleasant. Kodály was more sociable and better looking than Bartók, and he got in first.[31]

Did you know Kodály?

Not very well, although I sang in his choir at the Academy. I knew Leó Weiner better and considered him an extraordinary teacher. He taught chamber music and really persuaded his pupils to listen to the music they were learning. He wanted a clean sound and a beautiful touch. I recollect some particularly instructive times studying the D minor Piano Trio of Mendelssohn. It was in one such class that Weiner and his Jewish pupils were beaten up in front of us. When, in 1939, I found myself stranded in Denmark I decided not to return to Hungary. The political system was very objectionable.

Like Bartók's your life was totally disrupted by war?

I married in 1941 and became a Danish citizen. My husband had to leave in 1943 because of his activities in the Resistance and I was left with a son of

29 ■ The description cannot be correct. Both divorce and second marriage happened during the summer of 1923, between mid-July and late August; Bartók and Ditta Pásztory marrying on 28 August.
30 ■ Although Ditta Pásztory, dedicatee of the Third Piano Concerto, did not play the part dedicated to her for a long time, she did perform the piece with the Vienna Philharmonic conducted by Tibor Serly in 1964 in Vienna, when it was also recorded.
31 ■ Despite the very close friendship between Emma Schlesinger (then Mrs Gruber and later Mrs Kodály) and Bartók, it seems unlikely that Bartók ever considered marrying her.

three months. This was a very difficult time. I was personally warned by Crown Princess Ingrid that I was to be arrested and for most of the next two years I was on the move hoping that people would give me a bed for the night. I earned my living mainly by accompanying singers for three Kronen an hour. Sometimes it was twelve hours of Wagner—non-stop! Fortunately I was a very good sight reader and my technique remained intact.

Did you not want to return to Hungary?

The political situation made it almost impossible although we, that is my husband, me and our two boys, did visit in 1948 for two weeks to see my family. Budapest was in ruins. Of my parents' big flat only two rooms were left They had spent forty days in the cellar at the end of the war. Belongings were looted by the Russians. My sister had married an engineer who was sent to work at the Siemens factory in Germany. This was bombed. He was never seen again. Budapest Radio asked me to play, but they didn't want Bartók. Instead I performed Schumann's Etudes Symphoniques and the Theme and Variations by Nielsen. My husband rose to be an Admiral working for NATO. When the Iron Curtain came down it was not politically expedient for me to return. My mother asked me not to write: it was not allowed. I was not even able to attend my father's funeral.

But you made a successful career in the West?

I think so. I hope so? I specialised in contemporary music because I didn't want to play the standard repertoire over and over again. Copenhagen Radio was keen for me to play modern music. I began to specialise in the Second Viennese School: Stockhausen, Boulez and other lesser known composers, giving recitals all over Europe, the USA and the Far East and making CDs. I am particularly interested in the way Stockhausen expands the piano's sonorities.

Do you detect any Bartókian influence on recent piano music?

My study of Bartók, particularly the Bulgarian rhythmic elements, has helped me in several works, for instance *Cantéyodjaya* by Messiaen. I met Messiaen in Paris in the 1980s. He congratulated me on my performance of Scandinavian music, but when he heard that I'd studied with Bartók he said nothing. His piece is derived from the Hindu script Cârngadeua, which contains 120 different rhythms. There is an analogy here where the added notes are similar to those found in some Bartók. I think that Messiaen was continuing Bartók's innovations. Boulez calls them irregular rhythms, but actually they come from folk tunes. Incidentally, the second movement of Boulez' Deuxième Sonata (1948) reminds me of "The Night's Music" of 1926.

And you still play Bartók?

I do, but I am very worried about the future of his piano music. Very few people seem to play it, with notable exceptions such as Zoltán Kocsis. It doesn't seem to have entered into the general repertoire. Many years ago I gave the first Danish performance of some of Bartók's music in Copenhagen and had a full house. That would be very difficult today. It is true that some of his pieces are very problematic to interpret successfully, particularly such works as the Roumanian Christmas Carols that are not easy to make structurally coherent. Others, however, should be part of the repertoire, including the Sonata and *Out of Doors*. Incidentally, the latter piece was written for his second wife, which he wanted no-one else to perform, thus providing another contradiction in this extraordinary man's makeup.

At the age of 93 you are still giving concerts?

In 2002 I gave a recital in Budapest and in 2004 performances in England of Liszt, Bartók and Boulez as well as lecture-recitals.

So Bartók is still part of your life?

People are interested in him and he was a genius. He would go to sleep at 3:00 a.m. and be ready for work three or four hours later. He learnt enough Turkish in three weeks to be able to lecture in it.[32] I recall a conversation:

Bartók: Miss Klein, have you read this book?
EK: No.
Bartók: Of course not.
EK: What language is it?
Bartók: Danish.
EK: Excuse me, Herr Professor but do you speak Danish?
Bartók: All you need is a lexicon, then you can read anything.

He was referring to Jeppensen's *Kontrapunkt* which he considered to be the best book on the subject. In the 1930s he talked with a Japanese theorist about Lendvai, the circle of 5ths. Always curious.[33]

32 ■ Bartók studied Turkish before his trip to Turkey in November 1936 and he must have had enough knowledge to understand the folk texts transcribed for him by the composer Adnan Saygun, his interpreter during the trip. But he lectured in Ankara in French and German.

33 ■ Although Bartók was acquainted with fellow composer Ervin Lendvai (1882–1949), who lived in Germany and later in England, the reference to "a Japanese theorist about Lendvai, the circle of 5ths" seems to refer to the influential Bartók analyst Ernő Lendvai (1925–1993), who after the composer's death developed his theories based on the assumption that Bartók's tonality, like classical tonality, was still based on the circle of fifths .

JSM: *You obviously admired him, but you are also realistic.*

EK: I have said that as a teacher he rarely made any comments. It was enough that he was who he was—and the effect of those piercing eyes. In another context he was a great teacher, through his pedagogical work, the *Mikrokosmos*. This transcends the day by day work he undertook but so disliked. It's alive and often played, although the new edition prepared by his son Peter still contains errors. György Sándor, Bartók's only pupil in the USA altered passages that are still undetected. Young people are taught these pieces. There are distinguished recordings of his works, but how often are his piano pieces programmed? He hoped his pupils would promote them which we did. Now others must study them and take them forward. ❧

Light in Darkness

A New Work by György Kurtág—Two Conversations

Musicologists Márta Papp and Zoltán Farkas discussed György Kurtág's Songs to Poems by Anna Akhmatova, *Op. 41, before the broadcast of its New York premiere on Hungarian Radio (MR 3 – Bartók) on 19 February, 2009, Kurtág's 83rd birthday. On March 15, Márta and György Kurtág met Papp and Farkas in the Kurtág home.*

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Márta Papp: For a long time the Akhmatova cycle was counted among Kurtág's numerous unfinished compositions. The composer began working on the cycle in 1997, first conceiving it for solo voice; then he stopped. Following the world premiere, given in New York on January 31, 2009, he revealed the reason: the singer for whom the work was being written, Natalya Zagorinskaya, the Russian soprano who was so phenomenal in *The Messages of the Late R. V. Trusova,* had lost her voice, and Kurtág likewise lost his motivation. Then, as Zagorinskaya recovered her voice, Kurtág also recovered his motivation and finished the composition, 11 years later. When he picked up the thread again, he thoroughly reworked the material, adding an instrumental ensemble made up of a celesta, harp, upright piano, cimbalom, various percussion instruments, violin, double bass, flute and clarinet. In the last movement, brass, sirens and a wind machine appear as well. You heard the work at a rehearsal in Budapest, in December 2008. What were your impressions?

Márta Papp,
a musicologist and radio broadcaster is the author of a book on Mussorgsky.

Zoltán Farkas
is a musicologist and music critic. He was a Fellow at the Institute of Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences between 1987 and 2006, specializing in 18th-century church music and contemporary Hungarian music. Since 2006 he has been director of MR3-Radio Bartók, the classical music channel of Hungarian Radio.

Zoltán Farkas: I entirely understand why Kurtág insisted on this particular singer and not only because the text is Russian. Zagorinskaya is an exceptional talent, still very young, in her thirties. I was impressed by her discipline, restraint and stamina throughout the very difficult rehearsal. She sang these highly expressive texts with maximum emotional intensity, with the energy of an airplane taking off from standstill.

M. P. It is well known how intricate and sophisticated Kurtág regards the connections between text and melody. The four songs in the cycle demonstrate this vividly. The first poem is entitled "Pushkin"—one poet writing about another—and is a quite late poem from 1943:

> *Who knows what such fame is like!*
> *At what price did he buy the right,*
> *The possibility or the paradise*
> *To joke about it all so wisely and cunningly,*
> *To be mysteriously silent,*
> *And to call a foot a "footsie"?*[1]

Z. F. The handling of the text took me aback right in the first song. Kurtág seems to be savouring the beauty of language and the dramatic charge of the text, enjoying every syllable. I was reminded of the way Heinrich Schütz highlights certain details, captures the expressive force of a certain word in his Passions and other solo vocal works, expanding on the aura of the text. This approach seems to live on in Kurtág, although it is of course realized by entirely different musical means. The orchestration is very interesting, too: the movement has a light, airy, transparent, gossamer sound. Akhmatova feels awed by the mystery, the poetic greatness she perceives in Pushkin; there is a mystical atmosphere in the music to express this feeling of being deeply touched by the experience. Kurtág divided his ensemble into two groups and each group has a different function: the flute, clarinet and violin surround the vocal line with a contrapuntal design reminiscent of a plant runner, while the *cimbalom*, harp, celesta and upright piano (equipped with a special damper) provide a kind of acoustic accompaniment, a set of soft background colours.

M. P. Pushkin was a Mozartian talent in that he wrote works of genius with great ease—works full of wit, humour and sarcasm. Akhmatova's short poem treats all this with admiration, love, some jealousy and a great deal of irony. It is the shortest movement in Kurtág's cycle, taking barely more than a minute to perform. The music enlarges the playful questions of admiration and wonder; the leaps in the vocal line become wider and wider in an exaggerated manner. Where does he get off joking about everything in such a wise and cunning way?

1 ■ All poems translated by Judith Hemschemeyer, *Complete Poems of Anna Akhmatova,* edited and introduced by Roberta Reeder. Brookline, Mass: Zephyr Press, 1989.

The punch line, the contrast between "foot" and "footsie", is rendered through the contrast between a larger and a smaller interval. The second song is entitled "For Alexander Blok": one poet paying a call on another. Blok was a highly respected, truly great poet during his short life. He enjoyed a close personal relationship with Akhmatova—Kurtág's third song is her eulogy on Blok's death. "For Alexander Blok" was written in 1914:

I visited the poet.
Precisely at noon. Sunday.
It was quiet in the spacious room,
And beyond the windows, intense cold

And a raspberry sun
Above shaggy, bluish smoke...
How keenly my taciturn host
Regarded me!

He had the kind of eyes
That everyone must recall,
It was better for me to be careful,
And not look at them at all.

But I will recall the conversation,
The smoky noon, Sunday
In the tall, grey house
By the sea gates of the Neva.

Z. F. This second song is completely different in character from the first. It is folksy, dance-like and very Russian; at least that's how I hear it. It is like a Russian folk song or folk dance—not in terms of pitch or its melodies but rather in its rhythm and in its gestures. Kurtág can evoke the mood and the gestures of a Russian folk song without actually quoting one.

M. P. There are a few moments in the song where a highly ornamented vocal line suddenly becomes plain and begins to resemble (probably unintentionally) a song by Mussorgsky, "The Peasant Feast", which represents an archaic celebration in the country; very simple yet dignified. I think you have a good reason to hear Kurtág's song as 'Russian'.

Z. F. Of course, it is 'Russian' only in the sense Bartók spoke about folk inspiration: a composer deeply rooted in folk music reaches a point where not a single note derives from actual folk music, yet he writes as if he were writing folk music. The folk character is further manifest in the vocal ornamentation; the way he expands and varies the accompaniment is also reminiscent of the way variation is used in folk music. I was astounded to find that the message of the poem was quite different in Kurtág's setting compared to my reading of

the poem by itself. The original poem seemed hymn-like, filled with awe; Akhmatova seems to venerate Blok like a saint.

M. P. You felt no irony in the poem?

Z. F. No, none at all.

M. P. Maybe the irony comes across better in Russian.

Z. F. It does come across perfectly in Kurtág's music, which conveys much more than boundless and uncritical admiration. There are all kinds of quotation marks and different overtones. To me, this is a highly erotic song. Maybe the folk character and the constant pulsation reinforce that character. One no longer sees a saint simply venerated by a woman fellow poet. Rather you are taken on a visit with a great man, and the words "great" and "man" are stressed to an equal degree. At the words *"how keenly my taciturn host regarded me"* time seems to stand still; the melody, until now constrained to a narrow range, suddenly expands and grows almost to infinity in the space of two brief measures. Elsewhere, Kurtág gives the instruction in the score "shivering," like a woman shivering at the sight of a beloved man.

M. P. This shiver is illustrated by a brief instrumental interlude. At the beginning of the score, we read the following instruction in Russian and Italian: "With humour and charm, grace and calm, yet also with a little insolence".

Z. F. Yes, that provides a key to this text, which is all respect and veneration in the original.

M. P. The third song is entitled "Weeping and Mourning" ("Плач-причимание"). The title is Kurtág's. The poem speaks about Alexander Blok's burial in a coded form (one poet mourning another). Blok was one of the first victims of the Soviet system: he had fallen gravely ill during the difficult times after the war. He contracted scurvy and needed care. His doctors recommended treatment in Finland but the authorities kept delaying his passport until he died in 1921 after enormous suffering. Akhmatova makes an allusion to this in her poem.

Today is the name day of Our Lady of Smolensk,
Dark blue incense drifts over the grass,
And the flowing of the Requiem
Is no longer sorrowful, but radiant.
And the rosy little widows lead
Their boys and girls to the cemetery
To visit father's grave.
But the graveyard—a grove of nightingales,
Grows silent from the sun's bright blaze.

We have brought to the Intercessor of Smolensk,
We have brought to the Holy Mother of God,
In our hands in a silver coffin
Our sun, extinguished in torment—
Alexander, pure swan.

Z. F. The "pure swan" is Blok himself. I'm reminded of Schumann's *Frauenliebe und -leben* or Kurtág's own *Messages of the Late Miss R. V. Trusova* song cycle where attraction (be it veneration bordering on worship, erotic desire or a playful tease) turns to tragedy. The beloved man is no more: that's what this movement proclaims, negating—or perhaps complementing—the second song. Once more there's a certain folk inspiration in Kurtág's music.

M. P. You mean folk laments.

Z. F. Yes, and this time the folk source may be identified. The opening *cimbalom* solo, with its trembling trills, unfolds from sighs and quivering, reminding me of the instrumental folk music of the Gyimes region in Transylvania where these laments were traditionally played on the violin. Kurtág often substitutes a different instrument when imitating a folk performance. For instance, he evokes the violin playing of Mihály Halmágyi, the best instrumentalist in Gyimes—whose performance and whole presence was a great inspiration—with piano tremolos in the cycle *Plays and Games,* suggesting the way violinists in Gyimes vibrate on their instruments. Thus we hear an instrumental lament; what comes after the *cimbalom* solo is a real folk band comprising *cimbalom*, violin and double bass. I frankly don't know whether there is, or has ever been, a folk ensemble of this exact composition, but to the modern listener, these three instruments inevitably conjure up the image of a folk band playing archaic music from Gyimes.

M. P. The growl of the double bass and the sound of the *cimbalom* do in fact invoke folk music, but the harmonics of the violin are very unusual.

Z. F. That's the other thing: at first blush the three instruments do represent a folk band, but what they play is very different; at the least, it is highly stylized. The harmonics of the violin and the low melodies of the bass span an enormous acoustic distance, resulting in an eerie sound you wouldn't find in folk music. Yet this "pseudo-folk band" gets a solo after the first stanza of the poem; their interlude is a plaintive lament or dance-lament, a form that does exist in Gyimes folk music. The instruments become independent on two more occasions in the piece, in another interlude and then the postlude that concludes the song. By a poignant and psychologically authentic process, Kurtág gradually liberates the voice from its 'prison'—from its restricted stepwise motion—and makes it soar so that the lines of the poem become hymn-like. At the same time, the music of the

'folk band' becomes richer, denser, tenser and more eventful. The second interlude occurs at the moment when the cemetery of Our Lady of Smolensk, where the mothers are taking their children so that they can at least see the father's graves, grows quiet by the rays of the setting sun. Previously crowded by all the widows and orphans, the graveyard is now enveloped by silence. This second interlude is music of silence dominated by the opalescent, dim sonorities typical of late Kurtág: note the antique cymbals and the bass drum.

M. P. Don't you think this is a tolling of bells?

Z. F. The bells will toll at the end, in the postlude.

M. P. To me, they toll already here, perhaps because we are witnessing a church service. Bells are the only instruments admitted in the Russian Orthodox Church. They sound at the beginning of funerals and other rites; first the slow strokes of the large bell followed by the smaller bells in faster motion. The melody on glockenspiel and vibraphone we hear at this point reminds me of the small bells.

Z. F. There is another interpretation possible, though. We're not going to quarrel over whether or not the bells are tolling here for a short time; to me the real bell music is at the end of the movement. The little melody you are referring to reminds me of another work by Kurtág, namely the last movement of *Three Old Inscriptions,* op. 25, "On a Cross in the Cemetery at Mecseknádasd". This simple song for voice and piano also contains a moment where one stops at the cemetery and contemplates death. At that moment there appears a melodic fragment of extreme simplicity, entirely tonal, and totally different from the usual complicated contemporary idiom. Such melodies always serve as symbols of purity in Kurtág. It speaks volumes about how pure the person being buried was; and that is what this glockenspiel solo reminded me of. The third section of the poem, where we finally see Blok himself (or rather his body) is the high point of the whole song: *"We have brought to the Holy Mother of God … our sun … Alexander, pure swan."* The way Kurtág intensifies the musical processes is masterful; he introduces the percussion instruments, and the motifs of the snare drum increase the tension. Yet the music is not headed towards some kind of dramatic outburst: when we reach the most important part, the name "Alexander", the voice is reduced to a whisper, as if we don't dare to utter the name of the person being lamented. It is only after the secret has been revealed that the final tolling of the bells begins.

M. P. For me this third song is the emotional centre of the cycle, perhaps its most important movement. The fourth poem is entitled "Voronezh" and is dedicated to O.M., that is, Osip Mandelshtam (the poet encounters yet another poet). Among the poets tormented by the Soviets, Mandelshtam suffered a particularly tragic fate. Because of his 'dangerous' views, he was first exiled to Chernigov; later they had 'mercy' on him and moved him to Voronezh. I don't know whether Akhmatova ever visited him in that strange remote town, or whether she merely imagined the visit.

We know that they, too, were close friends. At any rate, to both Mandelshtam and Akhmatova, Voronezh was a dreadful place: a frozen, frightening, cruel and dark city where everything is icy and scary and you can't talk to anyone. Previously, Kurtág had set to music Mandelshtam's verses from his *Voronezh Notebook* as the fourth movement in his *Songs of Despair and Sorrow,* op. 18—an exceptionally evocative and expressive piece with some very strong sound effects. We hear similar effects in the last Akhmatova song as well: the song begins with a strong crack of the whip, a characteristic percussion instrument for 20th-century music. The wind machine sizzles, sirens scream, the timpani play tremolos, and the aggressive motifs of the *cimbalom*, violin and bass are joined by the brass instruments: horns, trombones and trumpets. The poem reads:

And the whole town is encased in ice.
Trees, walls, snow, as if under glass.
Timidly, I walk on crystals,
Gaily painted sleds skid.
And over the Peter of Voronezh—crows.
Poplar trees, and the dome, light green,
Faded, dulled, in sunny haze,
And the battle of Kulikovo blows from the slopes
Of the mighty, victorious land.
And the poplars, like cups clashed together,
Roar over us, stronger and stronger,
As if our joy were toasted by
A thousand guests at a wedding feast.

But in the room of the poet in disgrace,
Fear and the Muse keep watch by turns.
And the night comes on
That knows no dawn.

Z. F. This movement erupts with brutal cruelty into a composition that until now was ethereally transparent. In fact the poem itself doesn't even justify this cruelty. The horror is suggested both by the instruments and the vocal line, which is plagued by visions, tormented by nightmares, and never finds rest until the Epilogue, which is musically separated from the previous sections. Kurtág explicitly calls it an "Epilogue" in the score. But what kind of rest is it? The song—and the whole cycle—ends on a note of complete hopelessness. I've been wondering why Kurtág placed this utterly depressing and depressed image at the end of his cycle; after all, the first three songs are filled with beauty. You mentioned having a theory about this.

M. P. Yes. It is striking that, even at a first reading, Kurtág's new work is about creators—poets—throughout. With subtle dramaturgical sense, the cycle

explores images of poets: joking with genius, the attraction of greatness, a painful yet majestic funeral and finally, the suffering poet. In this closing song, Kurtágian tone-painting can be found everywhere: the ice, the crows on Peter's statue, the dulled, sunny haze (a musical representation of smoky fog), the poplars, "like cups clashed together," the imaginary wedding feast. Yet all this is merely an introduction to the essential part, the quiet Epilogue where we see the poet himself torn between his anguish and the Muse's kiss in his endless night with no hopes of a dawn. At the mention of the poet the melody becomes smooth and beautiful, the loud percussion and brass drop out, everything grows quiet, and finally we hear a single bell strike. This is a very personal work of Kurtág's; when the Muse appears at the end, she and Fear watch over the poet together. To me this work is about poetic creation and creators, about the essence of art, first in a gentle, ironic tone and then becoming more and more painful. It is the tragedy of the poet, of the creative artist.

Z. F. I am quite convinced by your interpretation. Come to think of it, the truth in Kurtág's music also depends on our awareness of Akhmatova's own fate, and, by extension, the fate of all poets, artists, creators in Soviet times. It would have been a mistake for him to let the cycle end on a lighter, rosier note, and not to sing about the Muse, present even in the midst of pain and horror. A single ray of sunshine is given to the creator, which is sufficient for him to produce great art. By making all this so sincerely and painfully clear in the last movement Kurtág includes himself in the idea of great art born of torment and pain.

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Márta Papp: When did you start working on the Akhmatova cycle?

György Kurtág: I began with the "Pushkin" poem, for unaccompanied voice; then I wrote the second and third songs, with a lot of sketches for the fourth. In the meantime, there was this cancer business eleven years ago; I felt nothing of the disease, but the fact was confirmed. The treatment was unpleasant, but not particularly. At any rate, I was unable to work for a year. I had visited America in the early 1980s, and then I vowed never to go back. But András Schiff and his wife persuaded me to go to Marlboro. This was after the illness. They gave us a little cottage in the woods. I did some teaching, but not an awful lot, so I had a lot of free time. That was where I started composing again. First I came back to the Beckett poems, and then to Akhmatova as well. I worked from memory; I didn't have my Akhmatova volume with me. I reconstructed the "Pushkin" poem; then I remembered the second poem, on Blok, on the return flight. I continued working in Amsterdam.

Márta Kurtág: Let me add something: when we arrived in that cottage in the woods, we were a little jet-lagged, but then in the morning Gyuri heard the birds from Bartók's Third Piano Concerto.

György Kurtág: It's a good thing you mentioned that: I had totally forgotten.

Márta Papp: It is fantastic, though, that you were able to work on the Akhmatova poems from memory. You must have read them a lot beforehand.

György Kurtág: As far as I'm concerned her poem on Pushkin is the most wonderful portrait ever made. It's interesting: what does it mean to people who know neither Pushkin nor Akhmatova? Nothing. By the way, in your radio programme, the adjective "Mozartian" about Pushkin was beautiful.

Márta Papp: Originally, was the whole cycle planned for voice alone?

György Kurtág: I thought the first two songs would be unaccompanied. Also, shortly before the trip to America, Heinz Holliger sent me the recording of *Trusova* with Zagorinskaya singing, and I composed the Akhmatova songs with her voice in mind.

Márta Papp: Your statement from New York has often been quoted: you lost interest in the composition when Zagorinskaya lost her voice, and when she recovered her voice, you picked up the cycle again.

György Kurtág: That's true, but I did occasionally take it out and added things during the interim: this is some kind of composer's disease.

Márta Kurtág: When Gyuri first met Zagorinskaya in person, in England last summer, she complained that the part was too low.

György Kurtág: I took that to mean that it was too low for her, so I transposed it higher. I wish I hadn't, because then it turned out that her high notes aren't really 'alive'; she works too hard there, wanting to 'sing.'

Márta Papp: So you only added instruments to "Pushkin" because the last two songs already had them?

György Kurtág: I originally wanted it to be unaccompanied. But when I showed it to Zagorinskaya last summer, there were some technical problems. I thought a supporting instrument or two wouldn't hurt even in the first two songs.

Márta Papp: But then you did much more, writing some really elaborate counterpoint for the instruments!

György Kurtág: It just happened; what am I supposed to do? In the first version, the vocal part was practically the same as it is now: you can look it up. The only difference is that it was originally a little more compressed—maybe that wasn't even a bad thing. Yet I now prefer the piece in its present form.

Márta Papp: Do you think that in Akhmatova's "Pushkin" poem admiration and awe predominate, or is there an element of tease?

György Kurtág: I don't think anything at all. The whole universe is in there.

Márta Papp: The poem has so many layers; and it ends with that "foot" and "footsie." That's an influence of folk poetry with which Pushkin was very familiar; folk poetry loves diminutives.

György Kurtág: Yes, but hang on a minute: I have a Russian book on eroticism in Pushkin, and it contains Pushkin's erotic drawings, mostly of female feet, which reveals his perverted relationship with female "footsies." But I hadn't read that when I composed "Pushkin." I had the book, but only read it later.

Márta Papp: The dramaturgy of the Akhmatova songs reminds me of the *Songs of Despair and Sorrow*, which begin with a poem by a classic Russian poet—Lermontov—and then move to the 20th century, with Blok, Yesenin, Mandelshtam, Akhmatova and Tsvetayeva. The later work also begins with a classic: Pushkin, here, seen through Akhmatova's eyes.

György Kurtág: It is very important that Akhmatova worked in Pushkin's house and even wrote a book on Pushkin.

Zoltán Farkas: In the radio programme, Márta and I figured out the mood of the second song together: I started out in my own way and she provided a counterpoint.

Márta Papp: Yes, I was surprised to hear your male-centred interpretation.

György Kurtág: But that's how I feel, too: the young girl who wanders into the great poet's house. *[Sings the ornamented melody]*

Márta Papp: In other words, the first poem expresses admiration for the great universal poet, and the second, beyond admiration, is filled with personal moments.

György Kurtág: Exactly. On the other hand, Akhmatova became so deeply involved with Pushkin when she was at his house that this relationship must have seemed entirely realistic to her. You should take a look at her book on Pushkin.

Márta Papp: Zoltán was talking about erotic attachments and shivers.

György Kurtág: And how! He has the kind of eyes that everyone must recall and for me—Akhmatova—it's better to be careful and not look at them at all! What is that, if not eroticism?

Zoltán Farkas: Yet I didn't feel the irony mentioned by Márta.

György Kurtág: I tried to compose the sauntering steps of the young girl, the movements of feet sticking out of a skirt, as I remembered them from *Klárisok*.[2] It is a snapshot: *[reads the poem]* I'm noticing just now that the word "мороз"

2 ■ *Klárisok* (Beads). A work for mixed choir on a poem by Attila József (1949).

(frost) alludes to the Voronezh poem. Yet neither of you noticed what matters to me the most. Of course this cannot be heard. With the exception of the first and last syllables, the words of the last phrase have to be mouthed silently: "У морских Ворот Не-[Вы...]," The score adds a comment[3]—these are my special messages. A similar thing happens in the *Colinda*[4] when the Moon rises and the Sun sets. The returning moment, "Aana, Aana," appears in thirds in the second aria, and at the end is quoted in fifths by the bass clarinet. There I wrote a quote from Eminescu into the score as a reminder. The poem says that the star which just appears is so far that it took its light thousands of years to reach us. The star might already be extinguished, but we only see its light now. In a similar way, we are pursued by the memories of extinguished loves. *[Recites the Romanian poem in an undertone]* The thought came to me very suddenly; I wanted it to be a gloss on the score. It is a very well-known poem. I asked Groza[5] what he thought. He tried to have the chorus members whisper it in an uncoordinated manner during the clarinet solo. Then he tried to recite it himself, with his back to the chorus; that wasn't good however, because he was facing the audience whereas he should have been reciting the poem facing away. It was an interesting experiment; we haven't decided whether to keep the poem. Similarly, at the end of the second Akhmatova song, the singer recites: "У-[*silent mouthing of the words]* "вы" "Увы" meaning "Alas"... Not necessarily a lament; it can be "Oh my!" The intervening syllables are not heard.

Zoltán Farkas: The singer articulates them without making a sound.

György Kurtág: Yes, the way I just demonstrated. That's what I asked her to do.

Márta Papp: At the beginning of the second song, the performer is instructed to sing the melody as if it were not ornamented.[6] That must be very hard!

György Kurtág: Not so hard, I can do it. Unfortunately, Zagorinskaya didn't sing it that way. You couldn't really work with her, you had to spare her voice during the rehearsals; it was the same in New York.

Zoltán Farkas: What exactly does it mean to sing the melody as if it were not ornamented; with a very light tone?

György Kurtág: As if it were of secondary importance. *[Demonstrates]* This is neutral. I suddenly thought of something else just now: maybe it's also somewhat salacious...

3 ■ There are two comments at the end of the second song, underneath the vocal line: "беззвучно только шевелья губами" (move the lips without sound), and "и, может быть придавить в глубине души, увы" (add at the bottom of your heart: alas). The performance instruction above the vocal line reads "в умилении" (with deep emotion).

4 ■ Kurtág's most recent work, *Colinda-Balada,* op. 46. See also Zoltán Farkas, "The Ballad of the Amorous Son", *HQ* Winter 2009, No. 196, pp. 143–48.

5 ■ Cornel Groza, the conductor of the world premiere in Cluj (March 29, 2009).

6 ■ *"Cantare la melodia come se fosse senza fioriture".*

Márta Papp: Then, when the voice switches to a simple, unadorned vocal line at the words "как хозяин молчаливый" (as the taciturn host); that, to me, is a very significant change.

György Kurtág: Here you simply speak, with musical pitches.

Márta Papp: This melody on "as the host" reminds me very strongly of the great melody that crowns the third song, "Александра лебедя чистого" (Alexander, pure swan). The vocal ranges are similar. Was this on purpose?

György Kurtág: No, it was probably an accident.

Zoltán Farkas: In both of these passages the tone becomes intensely personal.

György Kurtág: Unfortunately I rewrote the vocal line at the end of the third song, made it higher, and this did not come off well at the performance. As I said, I didn't have a chance to work with Zagorinskaya beyond rehearsing with the whole ensemble.

Márta Papp: I certainly feel a touch of irony in the third poem at the mention of the "rosy little widows." The irony is confirmed in the music by those little tone clusters.

György Kurtág: The words "little widows" are an immediate prompt, like the "footsies" in the first song.

Márta Kurtág: That reminds me of a Debussy song where the mothers take their children to the fair.[7]

Zoltán Farkas: And I was thinking of the text, where it is terrible enough that the mothers have to go to the cemetery to show the children where their fathers are.

György Kurtág: It certainly starts as an idyll, and the main event occurs later. That's why I needed the first bell-stroke, as a warning: "Watch out! That's not how things really are!"

Márta Papp: Can you then decide our argument? Do the bells toll already in the second interlude, or only at the end as Zoltán thought?

György Kurtág: They certainly toll at the end, and the earlier section is really similar. In any case, I needed a caesura here before the switch to the personal. But I'm surprised that you didn't notice the Gregorian quote in the third song, where the bells come in. *[Sings]*

Zoltán Farkas: We did notice the chime-melody, though we didn't call it Gregorian.

György Kurtág: That's what it is, though! It is a Gregorian Alleluia. Not literal, of course, but a fake. The Gregorian *do-re-mi* melody continues in the voice.

7 ■ "Chevaux de bois," *Ariettes oubliées,* on poems by Paul Verlaine, No. 4.

Márta Papp: How did the fourth poem, "Voronezh," end up in the cycle?

György Kurtág: I thought of it already when I was working on the Russian choruses; to me they belong together. In the Russian choruses, Voronezh is a kind of Mount Calvary, a frozen city. To me, the image of the city in the choruses and in the Akhmatova cycle is closely related. How should I say? We've told the whole horror story in the choruses, how he staggers to the sink, how he slides into the ditch and so on. And Akhmatova is about to visit him. To me, this is a continuation of what we already know about the place. It might be entirely subjective.

Márta Papp: A listener who hears the Akhmatova cycle but is unfamiliar with the Russian choruses would not know this; they wouldn't make the connection in their hearts and brains and thus would be unprepared for this horribly strong effect at the beginning.

György Kurtág: I thought: to visit an exiled person in Voronezh meant risking your life. Seemingly there were no consequences, yet Akhmatova's son was arrested, maybe two years later, I'm not sure. It was certainly a show of great courage for Akhmatova to visit Mandelshtam in Voronezh. That is very important to me. I needed the sirens because the battle at Kulikovo is mentioned: it was there that the Russians first defeated the Tartars. Voronezh is also in *War and Peace:* Prince Andrei and his family live nearby. I was also thinking of World War II, the bend of the river Don is near Voronezh, that's where the Second Hungarian Army perished.

Márta Papp: Is that what the foreboding opening of the song is referring to? I thought it was the horrible look of the city itself.

György Kurtág: No, the frozen city comes later. And the crows: Mandelshtam punned on "Воронеж" and "вороны" ("Voronezh" and "crows").

Márta Papp: Crows over the statue of Peter the Great—that means the glorious Russian past.

György Kurtág: Is that so? I thought this meant Peter's church. The hardest thing was to represent a glorious battle without sounding the least bit official, while still conveying some of the glory! I'm still thinking about whether I should bring back part of the siren sound at the mention of Kulikovo, or at the second "ликованье" (jubilation). At the words *"As if our joy were toasted by / A thousand guests at a wedding feast,"* the singer reaches her highest note, in forte, as earlier with Peter and Kulikovo; then she remembers that she is about to visit the poet in exile and breaks down. The music lets itself be dismantled; but I'm not sure whether I solved it well. I love these epilogues—these separate little arias—like the ending of *...concertante...*[8] with the silent violin; I don't know how they come across.

8 ■ For violin, viola and orchestra, op. 42 (2002–03, rev. 2007).

Márta Papp: The previous movement of the Akhmatova cycle, Blok's funeral is shaped the same way. That is a simpler pattern, reminding me of Bar form: A–A–B; the main thing is the B part, the end, which is really the epilogue, just like the conclusion of the fourth song.

György Kurtág: At the end, Fear is keeping watch and the night knows no dawn. It was a fantastic act of courage on Akhmatova's part to visit Mandelshtam in Voronezh. She was lucky not to have got into trouble right away.

Márta Papp: What does the "дежурят" remind you of? The "dezurnaya", the lady watching over the corridors of Soviet hotels?

György Kurtág: But here she is performing a service! And the "муза" (Muse) is none other than "надежда" (hope). The name of Mandelshtam's wife and muse was Nadezhda...

Márta Papp: This muse at the end is wonderful; to me there is a glimmer of light in the darkness...

György Kurtág: I didn't like your comparison to poetry in the radio discussion. This is more like life itself. The "Muse" is ambiguous: maybe he was really thinking of the Muse, but maybe it was his wife, the "miserable Muse," who was allowed to accompany him to Voronezh but not to Siberia. The ambiguity of the Muse is very unambiguous to me in this case. It's less about Poetry and Art... Of course many interpretations are possible.

Márta Papp: This poem is certainly the most enigmatic of all, and so is its setting.

Zoltán Farkas: And the cycle grows very dark at the end.

György Kurtág: It does. But that's history, quite simply. We're in the year 1936.

Márta Papp: In fact, the vocal line is constructed similarly in all four songs; it is the same concept found already in the *Russian Choruses,* where the voice begins in a narrow range and becomes gradually wider.

György Kurtág: Yes, I needed that. But now I'm terribly bothered by this constant jumping around in *Trusova.*

Márta Papp: In the Akhmatova songs, you could say that jumps only occur when needed.

György Kurtág: I'm not even so sure of that. Yet I tried. But I won't touch it again, that I know. ❧

(Transcribed by Márta Papp)

World Beats

Balázs Weyer Talks with Simon Broughton

Simon Broughton, a writer and filmmaker, is editor of world music magazine Songlines *and co-author of the* Rough Guide to World Music, *known as the "world music Bible". He was a guest at Budapest's 2010 Sziget Festival, one of Europe's leading music events, held each August.*

Balázs Weyer: *You're a specialist in many kinds of folk music. How did you get interested?*

Simon Broughton: Hungarian folk music was my first discovery, and it's very much this that got me interested in what we now call world music. I first came to Hungary in 1978 when I was a student. In fact, I went to work in Czechoslovakia in a student work camp. It was a kind of a cheap holiday. I was then on my way to Greece when somebody gave me the address of Béla Tolcsvai and said, if you go to Budapest, you must see this guy.

Tolcsvay had been working with Hungary's legendary Tolcsvay Trió as well as collecting folk songs in Transylvania.

I called him when I arrived at Keleti station. He told me to get the bus up to the Buda Hills. I wandered around for ten minutes in the pouring rain, so I turned up on his doorstep wet and dirty. He opened the door, gave me a hug, and invited me to stay. The next day he was going on holiday with his wife and son and left me the keys to his flat. He also put me in touch with a girl just to look after me, and I stayed for about three days. It was a fantastic introduction to Hungary. We spent half the night talking about folk music. It must have been then that he urged me to go to Transylvania. The girl he introduced me to took me to a *táncház* (Dance House) one night. I think this is how I got to know the band Muzsikás and Márta Sebestyén. A few years later I met up with Márta and

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Balázs Weyer,
a journalist, is the editor and one of the founders of origo.hu, Hungary's most visited news portal. He is also a passionate writer on world music.

The Dance House Movement

As early as around 1919 Bartók feared that the final hour had come for folk music collection. Tradition proved more resilient. Bartók, Kodály and their successors uncovered valuable material many decades later. In 1940–41 the composer László Lajtha, the third great figure in the story of ethnomusicology, recorded on gramophone a unique ensemble of instrumental folk music from Szék (Sic, Romania), a village in Transylvania in isolated picturesque sorroundings. The village is made up of three sections, each with its own dance house. The term *táncház* itself is of Szék origin. While authentic folk music continued to flourish in certain regions and was a topic of scholarly interest, its public appearance was limited to the activity of folk music ensembles as entertainment on the stage or as a tourist attraction.

A grass root revival of traditional culture started in the early 1970s, not least as an expression of sympathy with the Hungarian minority in Transylvania. Students carrying cameras and tape recorders plunged into the still living tradition of remote villages. Their collecting trips had anti-establishment overtones, and a substantial corpus of dance music together with its choreography was recorded. More and more young people joined in, wishing to enjoy and study this heritage at its source. This revival found a setting first in Budapest, in community centres and clubs, where young and old could listen to and dance authentic folk music, with the more experienced passing on what they knew. By the early seventies there were more than 60 dance houses throughout the country.

At the Fonó Buda Dance House, as part of the Final Hour project, between September 1997 and Christmas 2001, 46 Transylvanian bands appeared, 25 from Slovakia and 41 from the present state of Hungary. 1250 hours of music were recorded and transferred to the Folk Music Archives of the Institute of Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. CD recordings for sale were released, the New Patria Series, named in hommage to the Patria label under which music collected by Bartók, Kodály and Lajtha had been issued. ❧

we went together to Transylvania. You know it is one thing going to a *táncház* and seeing the music-making there, but it's quite another going to a village and just seeing and hearing this music *in situ*.

This was your first encounter with folk music?

Not exactly. When I was a kid we used to go on holiday to Ireland. There was, and still is, a fantastic traditional music scene in Ireland. It's changed a little, but you could go to pubs and find amazing music there. So I found that actually Ireland and Transylvania were two places in Europe that have a strong, living tradition. So Transylvania wasn't my first encounter with this type of music, but for me it seems a lot more exotic, and a lot more exciting.

And you came back regularly?

Yes, in the early eighties. I was here probably once or twice a year. And I came and made a couple of radio programmes for the BBC, and two of the episodes were from here. The main one was about Kodály and music education, and then I did a shorter one on the *táncház* scene. This was in the mid-eighties. In the meantime I travelled to Transylvania quite often and made friends there. In the early nineties I made a film about operetta in Austria and Hungary which looked at how Andrew Lloyd Webber had moved in on that scene. And I did a contemporary dance piece called *The Dancing Room* with Muzsikás, using really traditional Transylvanian music.

Dancing Couples, Szék (Sic, Romania), 1967. Photograph by Péter Korniss

Your view is that Hungarian and Gypsy traditions have influenced one another; Gypsy music having roots in the Hungarian tradition and developing as a strong dialect.

Yes, I'm not a purist like Kodály and Bartók who, I feel, framed Gypsy music somewhat negatively. Their view was that the music the Gypsies play was not traditional peasant music but "magyar nóta", a pseudo folk music.

They called it "műzene"*; imitation folk music or "artificial" music.*

Yes, but it has also become folk music in the process of being re-embedded into the folk tradition: go to Szék and you'll hear these *nóta* tunes played in Szék as folk music. A bit like the Csík Band when they played rock tunes as folk music.

This kind of music has more recently become a part of the repertoire of wedding bands, and it will be eventually seen as traditional music.

The point is just to show that these traditions are for us. And they mix. The Gypsies are fantastic preservers of tradition. Lots of people condemn them for mixing things up, but they really help music survive. It's interesting that there are various sub-groups of Gypsy music in Hungary: the Romungro is one, the Oláh another.

Hungarian folk music is less popular than, say, the music of Portugal, another favourite of yours. You are one of the few enthusiasts.

Portugal is probably the same size as Hungary and both have a distinctive style: fado and the *táncház* tradition in Hungary. But most people think of Hungarian music as Gypsy music. It's the cliché. So it's not the music that is the problem but the audience. Hungarian peasant music is fantastically beautiful and it is also rhythmically challenging. But both fado and Hungarian peasant music are quite sophisticated in their own way. With Hungarian music, I think, you need to spend a little bit more time and let it come closer; the reward is that it is often more powerful—like Bartók, whose music is at first quite hard to understand, but when you get to know it, and you understand what he is doing, it's enormously rich and powerful.

The album Söndörgő & Ferus Mustafov In Concert *was selected as one of* Songlines' *ten best 2010 releases. The group plays Southern Slav music and music based on the collections of Bartók and Tihamér Vujicsics.*

As a band, I like them a lot. I want to do a story about them and Vujicsics and the collaborations they're doing with Ferus Mustafov. At the Sziget Festival they were working with a wonderful *tambura* player from Mohács, József Versendi Kovács. They were showing me the sort of traditional, the Serb style of playing, the Mohács style of playing in southern Hungary, near the border to Serbia, which is more aggressive, more articulated. I think the rise of Balkan music had a big influence on the world music scene. But as Serbian and Macedonian and brass band music has risen, interest in the Hungarian scene has ebbed.

Yet you frequently find Hungarian CD releases classified as Balkan.

No wonder, if they invent a band like Besh O Drom, to make Hungarian music sound more Balkan. And certainly that Balkan style is much easier to appreciate and more instantly accessible.

The rhythm of Hungarian folk music is bound up with the language, isn't it?

Sure, and that's true of every language. I mean the way our songs sound is partly because of our language. And you notice it particularly in dactylic languages, which have an accent on the first syllable. Czech is similar in a way. Klezmer is another music I know quite well and the rhythms of that come from Yiddish.

How can you be open to so many traditions? What is world music? Where is the borderline between the genuinely traditional and the popularised versions? Songlines *takes the broad view.*

No one should argue that world music is homogeneous. For me it includes the whole spectrum, ranging from the strictly traditional to fusions and experiments with electronic music. All these things are part of the picture. World music is a name, nothing more; but people get a little obsessed with the name. There was a meeting in 1989 for about 20–30 promoters in the UK—record labels, concert promoters. They actually discussed what should we call this phenomenon. In the end they came up with the term "world music" and a marketing budget of around a thousand pounds. It was incredibly successful marketing.

Songlines *is one of the biggest promoters of this category. If there is no category, then there is no point in marketing it.*

Exactly. Twenty years ago, if you said "world music", people wouldn't know what we meant; now people do, and that's useful. It's useful that people know what you are talking about. People may argue: is this world music or not? But who cares? I wasn't present at the meeting where they devised the term. It was a way of describing music in the shops—a record bin to put some Hungarian music, some African music, some Japanese music, Bulgarian, and so on.

Is world music fashionable or is it already going out of fashion? Or is it not even a question of hype or fashion?

It fluctuates, but the long-term trend has been growing and growing. And there is a much bigger scene now than when *Songlines* started ten years ago, or when I first got involved ten years before that. It's growing in the same way that food from around the world is. Everyone has become more open to that. Every high street has more and more Greek, Indian and Chinese restaurants. Things that were once marginal have now become the mainstream. Ten, fifteen years ago the idea of recycling everything was a bit strange—a sort of fringe thing to do. And now it's a major obsession. ❧

Tamás Koltai

From Film to Stage

Martin Sperr: *Hunting Scenes from Lower Bavaria* • Lars von Trier: *Dogville* • Henri Murger/Théodore Barrière/Aki Kaurismäki: *La vie de Bohème* • Zoltán Kamondi/Pedro Almodóvar: *All About My Mother* • Attila Gigor/ Ingmar Bergman: *Persona* • Bernardo Bertolucci: *The Dreamers*

In recent years film, as a genre, has made inroads into the theatre. It is almost the norm to see the paraphernalia of film used on stage these days but, more tellingly, the medium of film itself is increasingly treading the boards.

The deeply disturbing film *Hunting Scenes from Lower Bavaria* actually started life in 1965 as a play by Martin Sperr before Peter Fleischmann adapted it to film four years later, with Sperr acting the main role. Fleischmann's award-wining film was released in Hungary in the 1970s. Róbert Alföldi and the National Theatre have deliberately adapted the film for stage rather than settling for the original play. Set in an idyllic village after the Second World War, it depicts remorseless intolerance in a rural community. Villagers shun a young mechanic whom they suspected of being gay. He himself sees his sexuality as an unmanageable deviancy. Their hatred sends him into a stupor and he commits murder. Alföldi's production examines how individual behaviours infect the community and lead to mass psychosis. Alföldi and his set designer contrive "real" situations: arriving members of the audience pass by a Sunday church service in the foyer while inside life carries on: the smell of cooked meat wafts around. The audience finds itself at the centre of a strangely naturalistic setting: realistic looking spaces, such as a kitchen and a shed, flank an artificial space arranged along the walls of a vast empty hall. The play culminates in a beer festival replete with brass band as the village celebrates the banishment of the deviant. The bizarre mixture of theatrical stylisation and a sense of realness is especially evident when Abram, the protagonist, and Rovo, a mentally retarded boy, are forced together on an iron ladder covered in stags' antlers: their interdependence hinges on their shared exclusion, while the audience, in the middle of it all, is sucked into the mass psychosis, "engaging" in the brutality of a nocturnal manhunt, a rite of capture, sentencing and Schrammel-toned euphoria. The performance disavows itself of the anecdotal-realistic tradition to viscerally pinpoint racism, exclusion and xenophobia.

Tamás Koltai,
editor of Színház, *a theatre monthly, is* The Hungarian Quarterly*'s regular theatre critic.*

Dogville (2003), one of the major art films of the past twenty years, is theatrical in the way Lars von Trier, its director, maps out a town with chalk on the black floor of an otherwise empty space, getting as close to anti-naturalist minimalism as you could possibly get. He films from odd angles with exotic lenses, and yet for all its artificiality the film mercilessly reveals the cruelty of the world.

We are encouraged to believe that the brutality and malice of the small town of Dogville is well within reach of us all, and Zsolt Anger's version at the Bárka Theatre—exchanging Von Trier's gangster film setting of the thirties for a modern block of flats in Hungary—drums this point home.

The upright citizens of Dogville are persuaded to shelter, for a trial two-week period, a beautiful woman named Grace—Angelika in Anger's version—who is on the run from gangsters; they use her initially to carry out various chores on a voluntary basis. But when Grace is discovered to be wanted by the police this leads to more exploitative demands. The men eventually take turns raping her, even chaining her to a large heavy iron wheel. For her part Grace initially humbly tolerates her workload. The tables are turned at the end, when it turns out that Grace has been trying to flee the life led by her father, a mobster. At her command, the town is burned and all its inhabitants, from infants to the elderly, are brutally murdered by the gangsters, so that nothing remains except Dogville's dog. Father and daughter discuss whether avenging an injustice is more or less arrogant than absolving it.

The Bárka Theatre might have done better to keep the abstract parable in place, leaving the audience greater scope to form their own association of ideas. Von Trier's film was poorly received here, so perhaps parabolic abstraction does not go down terribly well with Hungarian audiences, who have perhaps got out of the habit of relating universalised abstractions of life's problems with their own lives. This production clearly felt a need to jab the reality of exclusion, xenophobia, and shallow-minded existences in our faces, just in case we failed to grasp what the ills of today's society are.

Anger's *Dogville* straddles the parabolic and lifelike. Three didactic soliloquies serve as a prologue. The first, delivered by a black actor who was born in Hungary, balancing between the personal and the role, a flag in the Hungarian tricolour on his pullover, shows the audience what it feels like to be different in Hungary. The second soliloquy is that of a typical individualist, while the third actor who plays a film director, the prime mover of events, is dogmatically committed to acceptance and compassion. The didacticism prepares the ground for the chasm between words and deeds that opens up later. Elegant, worldly Angelica, fleeing from persecutors and the police alike, will scrape out an existence at the mercy of the inhabitants of a rundown block of flats, which will become the Passion of her sufferings.

The French writer Henri Murger's 1846–49 novel *Scènes de la vie de Bohème,* which he adapted in 1849 for the stage together with playwright Théodore Barrière, was immortalised by Giacomo Puccini's opera *La Bohème.* The Finnish film director Aki Kaurismäki transposed the story in his 1992 film *Bohemian Life* to a contemporary setting. The Romantic

melodrama about Bohemian artists was thus fashioned into a story about Eastern European émigrés who find release in a modern Paris from the lack of prospects in the new post-Communist world. Jaded intellectuals, no longer in the first flush of youth, struggle with the freedoms of the West. Tamás Ascher and the Örkény Theatre in Budapest have soft-pedalled the blasé bitterness and added a touch of grotesque buffoonery and surreal absurdity, somewhat scorning the idea that the life of an artist is superior.

The protagonist Rodolfo is an Albanian painter who has been living in Paris for three years, and when surprise is expressed at how well he speaks French, he replies that he had a French nanny who came from Barcelona. This is our cue not to worry ourselves about how seriously to take the sociology of the play. Neither should we think that we are dealing with an immigrant problem to be interpreted in present-day terms or with the question of post-Communist migration. If we feel tempted to place the period, then the transistor radio with a pull-out aerial suggests the 1960s.

The broad outlines of the story follow the original. The protagonists have to contend with issues of their bread-and-butter existence and residence permits. If they are penniless, they starve, and if they lay hands on any money, they squander it. They are happy to be in love, and unhappy to be ditched. That's about the long and short of it. Otherwise all three are toiling to create a Great Work of Art—Rodolfo has spent seven years painting a canvas with the title *The Crossing of the Red Sea*; Marcel is trying to find a publisher for a play called *The Avenger,* which comprises 320 scenes (and bankrupts the *New Fashion Journal* by having it brought out in serial instalments); and musician Schaunard is at work on a composition with the title *The Influence of Blue in the Arts,* one version of which he plays on the piano, to the horror of those present and the neighbours to boot.

The play eulogises the free and therefore unliveable life of ineffectual, irresponsible, independent yet loveable cranks. At the end, Rodolfo and a dog named Baudelaire are left playing with a ball; after a while the ball disappears and only the motions remain. As in Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow Up,* they merely mime the motions in their own virtual reality, which is perhaps more real (at any rate more acceptable) than the external one.

The challenge is more complex when a masterpiece of film history or a cult film is transferred to the stage. A stage adaptation of Pedro Almodóvar's 1999 film *All About My Mother* is by Australian playwright Samuel Adamson. It received its world première at the Old Vic Theatre in London in September 2007. He added further twists to the plot, playing with the time-worn concept of a play within a play whereby the story of a mother in search of the past of her teenage son who has been killed in a traffic accident becomes slightly confusing, since there is no way of telling what is taking place in reality and what is a fiction dreamed up by the story-telling writer-director (the young man).

The production by Zoltán Kamondi (also a film director) at the Pesti Theatre raises similar questions, notably whether there is not too much risk attached to a theatrical "reproduction". Another example is the noted Romanian-born American theatre director Andrei Şerban's adaptation for the Hungarian State Theatre of Cluj-Kolozsvár in Transylvania of Ingmar Bergman's 1972 film *Cries and Whispers.* Şerban wrote a role for

Bergman himself as the film director who just happened to be shooting the film in question and who, every now and again, would cut the shoot in order to dispel the puzzlement or uncertainty of the actresses about their roles in the film, or to explain the scene that was being played. This is a stretch at times, just as the adaptation of Almodóvar's film for the stage is. In both cases the creator's intention looks like amateur tinkering in order to make you conscious of the inner workings of the creative process. Şerban is a director who thinks on a large scale and is able to contrive extraordinary, poetic, and often provocative visual effects on the stage. This time, however, the message rarely rises above the commonplace. The two principal characters, both brilliant actresses, struggle with their dual role as they try to portray both Bergman's characters as well as the actresses playing them. Much the same happened with *All About My Mother* at the Pesti Theatre: stepping out of Almodóvar's figures and presenting the theatrical banalities of play-acting robbed the actors of any chance of delving any deeper into human relationships. The transsexual, the pregnant young nun, the father—who not only left his son behind but also his original gender—are turned into curiosities which strike the audience as peculiar, whereas Almodóvar wanted us to understand them.

Attila Gigor is another film director who wrestles with one of Bergman's works, the extraordinary and spiritual *Persona* (1966). He was obliged by force of necessity (Bergman having died in July 2007) to drop the ploy of having Bergman himself as the narrator. (Şerban, on the contrary, personified and identified with him) and modestly made do with striving to evoke his spirit. He set up an abstract and, in the nature of things, sterile theatrical arena out of the bare hall of the Zsámbék Theatrical Base, cleaved by a single beam of light, in which a single bed represents the hospital environment, and, later on, the world outside. The empty expanse is the space of the invisible, the inner space in which Elisabet Vogler (Liv Ullman's role in the film), who turns mute during the performance, and the young nurse Alma (Bibi Andersson) enact the drama of their shifting relationship: two women who are dependent on one another, at the mercy of one another, and who gradually copy one another and "swap" personalities. The Beckettian endgame requires no stage props or scenery: sufficient here are the two *personas*. In Latin *persona* means "mask", and what takes place between the two characters could be called "de-masking". An actress, alienated from her profession and from her own mundane (social) reality, falls silent, while the ordinary, unwilling and incompetent nurse starts by chattering. But gradually, undetected even to herself, she discards the banal, insignificant and ephemeral in her personality in order to bring to the surface the frightening secrets of what she has repressed, the unconscious and the realm of instincts. The two women's relationship undergoes a transformation, with their "profiles" dissolving into each other. (Bergman said the inspiration for the film came from the fact that Liv Ullman and Bibi Andersson resemble each other.) Later on, after going through the hidden, ambivalent stages of hanging-on, love, sexuality and hatred they again diverge and the "exchange of roles" is complete: the actress returns to society whereas the nurse's simple, narrow life collapses.

In a theatre adaptation it is not possible to draw on the devices that a film can bring to bear—the cameraman's work, montages, fade-outs—which make it hover between reality and the virtual, between actual events and dreams. Attila Gigor's spare and sarcastic version for the stage, fortunately, makes little attempt to import anything more than the economical application of lighting effects. As a result almost the entire burden falls on the actresses to portray every outward and, above all, inner event—a commendable directorial decision but a largely futile enterprise given the insolubility of the task. The two actresses in this production (who do indeed slightly resemble each other) present delicately outlined characters, not so much interpretations as "essences", and therein resides their main virtue.

Some of the adaptations on offer are banal. The Thália Theatre put on a play fashioned from Bernardo Bertolucci's 2003 film *The Dreamers.* To the best of my knowledge, it has never previously entered anyone's head to try to do so, which is perfectly understandable as its two main concerns are very much tied to time and place and a specific mental climate, namely, the backdrop of the 1968 student riots in Paris and young French filmmakers involved in French film mythology. These concerns have left no roots at all in today's Hungary. The actors in this production strut among the white walls of the scenery and rave about cult films and sex with the latter being treated with a prudery with is far removed from Bertolucci's eroticism, earthly and real.

Barry Levinson's 1988 film *Rain Man* is a typical product of Hollywood in that it sells an affecting story about a sentimentalised encounter between an autistic savant and his crook of a brother who mends his ways for the brother's sake. Dustin Hoffman and Tom Cruise throw in the whole arsenal of observation, mimicry and stagecraft so that even viewers who can see through the game are willing to go along with it, enchanted as they are by their skills. This is a trap of the Hollywood industry, though by no means harmful for those who fall into it: they gain models for patterns of behaviour (notably portrayed) for storytelling and imagery. In sum, a cultured transmission of humane subject matter is taking place. Even if the viewers are ultimately tricked, this is done in good taste, in the name of ideals and morals.

This adaptation was presented by Belvárosi Theatre, one of the few private rather than state-sponsored companies in Hungary—it must be commercially successful at any cost. A small industry has grown up out of the dream factory: a bit of cabaret, some stripping, a dollop of sex, and lots of sheer stridency. Yet the actors who present it are good, and it was directed by the same Zsolt Anger who did *Dogville.*

Theatres are presenting ever more film successes on stage, such as the sentimental 1983 film *Romantic Comedy,* a crowd-pleaser, which was directed by Arthur Hiller based on a screenplay by Bernard Slade, which in turn is based on his own stage play. There is also the harsher chamber theatre, *Closer,* written by Patrick Marber, based on his award-winning 1997 play of the same name and directed by Mike Nichols for a 2004 film. These are box-office hits. If they had been written for celluloid film, as used to be the case, the signs of wear would be evident. The digital technology of today may preserve an original, but some of the copies that are made for the theatre are certainly the worse for wear. ❧

Erzsébet Bori

Reanimation

Ágnes Kocsis: *Adrienn Pál; Friss levegő* (Fresh Air)

Piroska Fodor, the night-duty nurse on the ward for the terminally ill, hauls her vastness through corridors of the hospital, feeds the patients and changes their bedclothes, sits in front of a wall of cardiac monitors, and if any of them signals, alerts the doctor on duty. Often enough she takes the body by lift to the basement mortuary. Death is part of Piroska's daily routine. Slowly we learn she has done all this for almost twenty years without a blot on her copybook. Recently, though, her behaviour and discipline has come under scrutiny.

Meanwhile her husband Karcsi has grown anxious about her. She fails to stick to her diet and is lousy on the exercise bike. She is taciturn and shows no interest in his job which involves artificially inseminating cattle, or his hobby, a model railway occupying an entire room in their old apartment. As their relationship founders, a complete town with railway station, high-rise centre and a suburban fringe of bungalows grows up amid wooded hills and sheep-dotted pastures. Karcsi is unaware that she steals out of their bedroom for midnight raids on the fridge, or that she's a regular at the pastry shop nearby, where she stocks up cream puffs for the night shift.

We see vacant eyes buried in a puffy face. Abruptly they shift. A new patient is being admitted. Adrienn Pál is the name on the admission card. Piroska rushes over to the hospital trolley. The patient is an unconscious old woman who happens to share the same name as one of Piroska's long-lost childhood friends. This sparks a dogged search for her old friend. She travels the length and breadth of Budapest and even takes a train to the sticks, seeking out former teachers, neighbours and schoolmates. Along the way we get glimpses of the generation which grew up after the return to democracy in 1989–90.

Her search looks hopeless at first. At one point we even doubt whether Adrienn Pál ever existed. Memory is notoriously uncertain and subjective—not one of her past acquaintances has any recollection of Adrienn Pál. What does become clear, however, is that Piroska Fodor left deeper impressions on those around her than her idealised friend. The obese woman was

Erzsébet Bori
is The Hungarian Quarterly*'s regular film critic.*

once a spry young girl who stood out for her kindness and terrific memory. As a human form begins to emerge from behind the shapeless body and dull expression, we come to realise the true purpose of her expedition.

With a sureness which belies the fact that *Adrienne Pál* (2010) is only her second feature film, the 39-year-old Kocsis directs her central character on the pathway into the deeper recesses of the psyché more thrilling than any Hollywood blockbuster. All this is done without recourse to any tricks, indicating that she is a director with very firm ideas—a thoughtful and imaginative artist prone to introspection. Minimalism is beguiling: on the surface it looks easy to carry off but in fact it takes a lot of detailed planning to do it well. A couple of less accomplished scenes in this virtually flawless film are good illustrations of how what Kocsis gets right most the time can go wrong in one or two scenes. The sociological vignettes of old acquaintances are sometimes overdone. She tries to show too much about a figure than is possible in three shots and three minutes. When she gets it right, she uses an object to reveal something about the character. But sometimes this device gets heavy-handed and leads to caricature. This is a shame because one of Kocsis's major virtues as a director is that she tends to avoid making caricatures or judgments. (The nouveau riche businesswoman's slippers speak volumes; taking us on a tour of her home over-eggs the omelette. In contrast, the classmate who now runs a car-stripping business or the waitress in a night bar are acutely observed characters.)

The little men of this world have many grotesque features, habits and involuntary tics that are easy to exaggerate and ridicule; Kocsis has an uncanny way of avoiding stepping over the boundary between showing the ridiculous and ridiculing it. From this point of view her first feature *Fresh Air* (2007) takes risks. It tells of the troubled relationship of a mother, a lavatory attendant in a Budapest underpass, and her teenage daughter. In Kocsis's portrayal, the lowly job itself is not at all beautified but the person doing it is. From the outset Viola does not correspond to the stereotyped image of lavatory attendants: she is a slim woman of forty-plus who is good-looking even when she is tired, so there is good reason why she is thought attractive by the men whom she gets to date "for a laugh" at dance evenings of the lonely hearts' club, or who respond to small ads she places in newspapers. She doesn't take it too seriously, and we should infer that she has a close relationship with her daughter—which she has, even if appearances suggest otherwise. Viola and 17-year-old Angela live like strangers in their two-room flat on a housing estate. The girl is repelled by the smell (imagined rather than real) that her mother brings home from her job, so she has taken to a dramatic air-freshening procedure when the mother gets back and keeps the door to her own room closed. Most of the communication takes place on slips of paper, even if they watch every episode of *The Octopus*, an interminable Italian television series about the Mafia, together. Viola tolerates her daughter's surliness, and, sensing her aversion, is not satisfied with taking a nightly bath and washing her hair—she scrubs herself raw.

Angela attends a garment trade school and would like to be a fashion designer. Winning a competition for the young, she sets off to Italy with great hopes (and not a little childish naivety). Thumbing lifts, she actually gets to the border late at

night, when she is picked up by a family from Rome. When she wakes up she finds she is exactly where she started off: the Italians were heading for Hungary, but language difficulties got in the way. (Kocsis seems fond of the fool's errand: Piroska, while travelling to a remote village to look for her long-lost friend, learns that she has been admitted to the hospital where she works.) Angela's bout of teenage defiance collapses after her mother is badly beaten and taken to hospital. The daughter realises just how this shameful and despicable job has been putting bread on the table for both of them. Perhaps she also realises that she has been afforded the protective shield of her mother's mute love. The fact that the seismic force of this drama of emotions can be played without heart-rending confessions or tearful embraces is Kocsis's great strength as a director.

Kocsis has accumulated a long list of prestigious prizes at home and abroad just for these two films. She possesses a recognisable, identifiable style and outlook. The makings of what may be an established film crew are emerging with Andrea Roberti billed as co-director and co-writer, Ádám Fillenz as cameraman, and Ferenc Pusztai as producer, though the young amateur actress Izabella Hegyi, who plays Angela in *Fresh Air* and also has a big role in *Adrienn Pál* alongside the likewise amateur (and brilliant) actress Éva Gábor, who features as the protagonist, also deserve credit. Authenticity is clearly the main criterion for Kocsis in her choice of actors. Even with professionals, she seems to be happier picking provincial actors who have not been seen for a long time, if at all, in films. It's clear that the cameraman, too, has got into his stride. The visual world of *Fresh Air* is a bit artificial, with an overblown use of colour (red for Viola and green for Angela). But following that intermittent punctuation of the cold blue (hospital) hues which are the predominant tone of *Adrienn Pál,* the airy shots convey not just bleakness, emptiness and sterility but are natural, too.

The camera work serves the film as a whole. Music and dialogue, however, are different matters. Kocsis has not yet made up her mind what the music should serve or how dialogue works. Whole scenes can pass in silence, or otherwise punctuated by small talk which merely provides a backdrop. Yet others switch to loquacity. *Adrienn Pál* is a slow-moving and long film. It is slow because its own rhythm is slow. If sometimes the 136 minutes appear to drag it is not because of the tempo but because of the unnecessary breaks in the tempo. For one thing, Piroska hunts out just too many acquaintances, and some of the visits are just not worth the film time devoted to them. In some scenes a minor character is allowed to hog the screen, telling us a good deal more about themselves than we need to know.

Both *Fresh Air* and *Adrienn Pál* are open-ended. In both cases several (fateful) phases in a process are played out before our eyes. But they are not wrapped up by the time the final credits roll. The director only hints at possible continuations, leaving the rest up to your imagination. ❧

Soma Rédey

The Birth of a New Genre

Using Documentary Films as a Teaching Aid in Hungary in the 1930s

By the 1930s it was clear in leading film-industry nations that the "Seventh Art" held far greater potential than entertainment alone, and open-minded researchers and teachers readily embraced motion pictures as a science and education tool.

Several scientific papers from this period reported on experiments related to motion pictures. One article[1] published in 1930 concerns a recording with a high shutter-speed camera. Two German scientists, Cranz and Glatzel, made a camera in 1912 that could record around 100,000 pictures per second, capturing the flight of a bullet at 895 meters per second as it passed through a copper sheet. Another article[2] discusses the work of Stutzin and Kiss, two professors of medicine, who filmed inside the human body. With a high-powered lamp and a cystoscope, they filmed their operation and screened it for their students. With this method, also used in Hungary, it became possible to illustrate cardiac and pulmonary functions in real time. Yet another paper[3] published in 1935 reported on an experiment carried out by the American Meteorological Society in Washington, D.C. The society filmed the movement of clouds and other atmospheric transformations. To achieve their recording, they used a special camera with a super low-shutter option that could record one frame every four seconds. They filmed around 150–200 frames to show a 10–15-minute-long process of atmospheric transformation.

In Hungary the educational advantages of film were soon recognized, and political decision-makers took appropriate steps. It was Hungary which was the first in Europe to take institutional decisions to support develop-

1 ■ *Természettudományi Közlöny*, February 1930, p.118.
2 ■ *Természettudományi Közlöny*, September 1930, p 514.
3 ■ *Természettudományi Közlöny*, May 1935, p. 532.

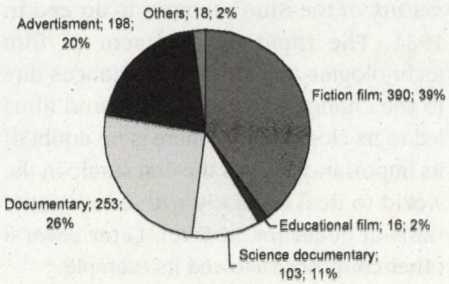
Soma Rédey
is a councillor at the Communication Division of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. He studied engineering and management at the Budapest University of Technology and Economics and theory and film history at Eötvös Loránd University. He is writing his PhD thesis on the role of science documentary films.

ment in this field. In the very early stages of film history, in the first decade of the century, the Educational Film Studio was established to coordinate teaching aided by documentary films. The most important step was taken in 1924 when Count Kunó Klebelsberg, the minister of education (1922–31), required state schools to use films. In practice, this meant pupils aged 6–18 had to attend one of the cinemas closest to their school and watch a film which was included in their curriculum. Considering the burgeoning film market in Hungary at that time, there were many cinemas to choose from and the nearest cinema was easy to find.

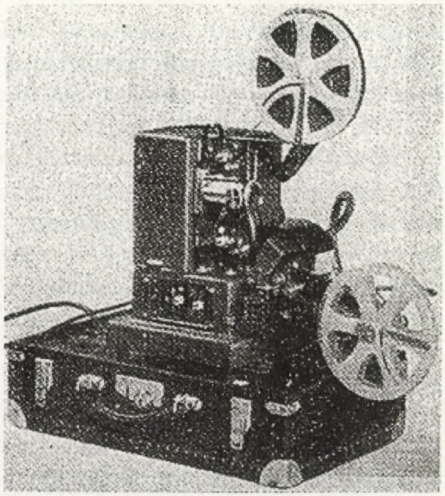
Problems abounded in the early stages. The main one was a paucity of films. Schools had to be equipped with lightweight portable narrow-film (16 mm) projectors, creating serious financial difficulties for many. There was also a safety issue: made of cellulose nitrate, the film was highly flammable, and a change to a less flammable material required new production technology.

In 1929, the ministry established the Cultural Film Department, which was also responsible for educational films and an official project to support the promotion of educational and cultural films got under-

Number of films produced in Hungary in 1937



Published in Filmkultúra, *March 1938*



Portable narrow-film projector.
Source: Természettudományi Közlöny

way. In the same year Hungary joined the Rome-based International Educational Cinematographic Institution which dealt with educational films internationally.

Why did the question of educational films suddenly become so important? Demonstrations using motion pictures had many advantages. They were first used for courses where illustrations with still frames were already used to help children comprehend and memorize subjects in the areas of geography, natural history, zoology, and ethnography. Further, extant films in these fields could be easily employed or adapted. In addition, elementary school teachers also made use of animation in subjects such as history and mathematics. With the use of educational films, the decision-makers did not want to diminish the teachers' role in teaching but to make extra tools available to them. According to contemporary reports explanatory presentations before and after the screenings usually lasted around twenty minutes.

Later, thematic and structural differentiation between the several styles of

documentary (cultural, educational, and scientific) became even more sophisticated. Imre Mosdóssy, a councillor at the Ministry, wrote a number of articles[4] about the observable differences between cultural and educational movies. Regarding what was labelled 'cultural' films, the subject of the movie and its introduction were dominant, and a detailed presentation of the topic was emphasized; the focus was on everyday life, reality, and nature. For educational films, the method of cinematic presentation was different. Although the topic sometimes stayed the same, the presentation became simpler and more obvious and concentrated. It was important to complement these films with commentaries: first, the silent movies had text inserts, and later they employed audio dubbing. Cultural films required longer and complete stories, whereas educational films called for shorter, episodic sequences. Mosdóssy, in his twelve-part article series, reports on the importance of cooperating with educationists in the process of filmmaking. Whenever possible, the subject of the film had to be chosen with the help of the teacher. Of course, the episodes always needed to follow the curriculum.

A comprehensive picture of the institutions of the Hungarian educational film system emerges from articles published in the periodical *Filmkultúra* (the first Hungarian film-related periodical, launched in 1928). The journal, edited by Andor Lajta, included a section called "Educational Movies" between 1928 and 1938. Hungarian educational film production before the Second World War, it turns out, was based on four pillars: the Educational Film Studio, the Hungarian-Dutch Cultural Company; the Department of Educational Movies of the Ministry for Religion and Education Affairs; film education in Budapest coordinated by the mayor's office. The first three were the most important.

The Educational Film Studio

The Educational Film Studio established in 1913 was the first to produce educational films for schools. The idea to establish the studio came about at a conference held the same year. Besides producing suitable films, the Studio was also responsible for providing projectors for schools and to maintain a permanent commission consisting of teachers who selected the films to be made.

The first head of the studio was Béla Ágotai, a former schoolmaster. By the 1920s, the studio aspired to produce a film series instead of individual items. At that time the films were mostly shown in school gyms, in about 68 around the country, but bearing in mind halls etc., films were shown in 102 elementary schools, in 23 boys' junior high schools, in 31 girls' junior high schools, in 50 boys' trade schools, and in 15 girls' trade schools in the 1920s. Between 1913 and 1931 about 80,000 pupils attended one of the 10,000 educational presentations held by the Educational Film Studio. The schools mostly used their own projector, or rented a narrow-film projector. The history of the Studio comes to an end in 1931. The rapid development of film technologies and straitened finances due to the change from silent to sound films led to its closure. Still, there is no doubt of its importance. It was the first studio in the world to deal officially with educational films at government level. Later several other countries followed its example.

4 ■ *Filmkultúra,* February 1930, p.15

The Hungarian-Dutch Cultural Company

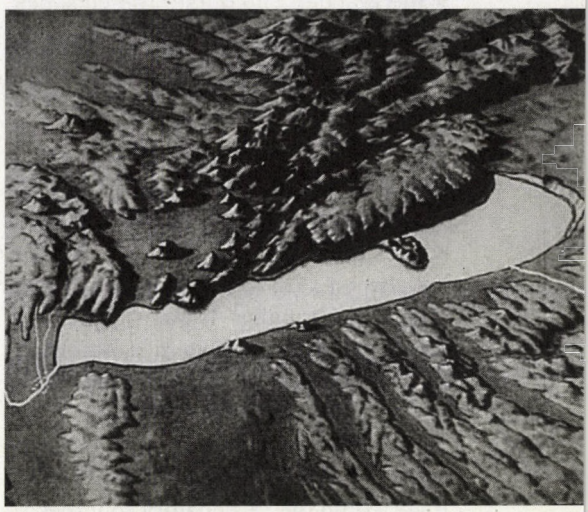
Kunó Klebelsberg issued a decree in 1924 making educational films obligatory in Hungarian schools. Apart from the Educational Film Studio, two institutions were mandated by the government: the Hungarian Ethnographic Society and the Hungarian-Dutch Cultural Company. Dutch–Hungarian cultural connections go back to the decade after the First World War. Owing to an agreement between the two countries, the Netherlands started to send donations to Hungary. These included aid and exchanges: an opportunity for Hungarian children to travel to the Netherlands and live with a Dutch family for periods of various durations. Later, this aspect of cooperation became even more intensive and focused on cultural issues. Within its framework, the company compiled educational film programmes from 1927. They also organized the transportation of films to schools, equipped them with projectors, distributed Dutch movies, and translated, subtitled, and later, dubbed them. Thanks to the company's efforts educational films were screened in 41 secondary schools in Budapest and in 60 secondary and elementary schools in the provinces in 1924–25. This number increased to 105 a year later.

In 1928–29, the company broadened its services by assuming an even more important role in technically equipping schools. Since it was a business enterprise, the company collected fees for each screening. It was obligatory to hold eight screenings (also including related scientific presentations) per year; the price of each was 28 fillérs (1 kilo of bread cost 24 fillérs in 1928) so pupils had to pay a total of two pengős and 24 fillérs a year. Elementary school pupils had to pay a bit less: 24 fillérs per screening. If the equipment was damaged, the cost of repair was charged to the perpetrator.

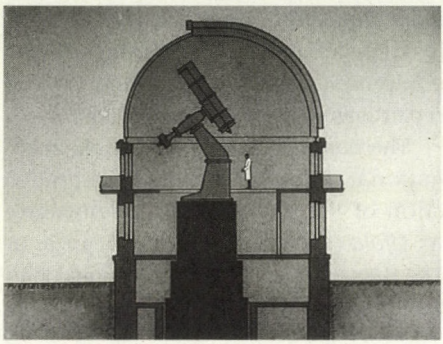
The company had considerable international success, including the production of the educational documentary *Az Alföld* (The Plain), which won prizes at The Hague International Educational Film Conference in 1928.

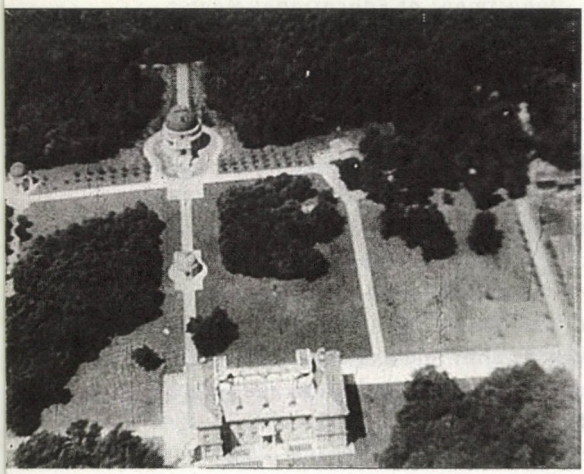
Department of Educational Movies of the Ministry of Religion and Educational Affairs

In the 1930s the government once again dealt with educational films. In 1934, Bálint Hóman, succeeding Klebelsberg as the minister of education, established with a decree the Department of Educational Films within the Ministry. The aim was to unify and standardize Hungarian educational film production and secure it financially for the long term. In state secondary schools it became obligatory to allocate three percent of each student's



Animation of the film Genesis of Lake Balaton,
Source: Hungarian National Film Archive





Pictures of the film The Observatory of Svábhegy,
Source: Hungarian National Film Archive

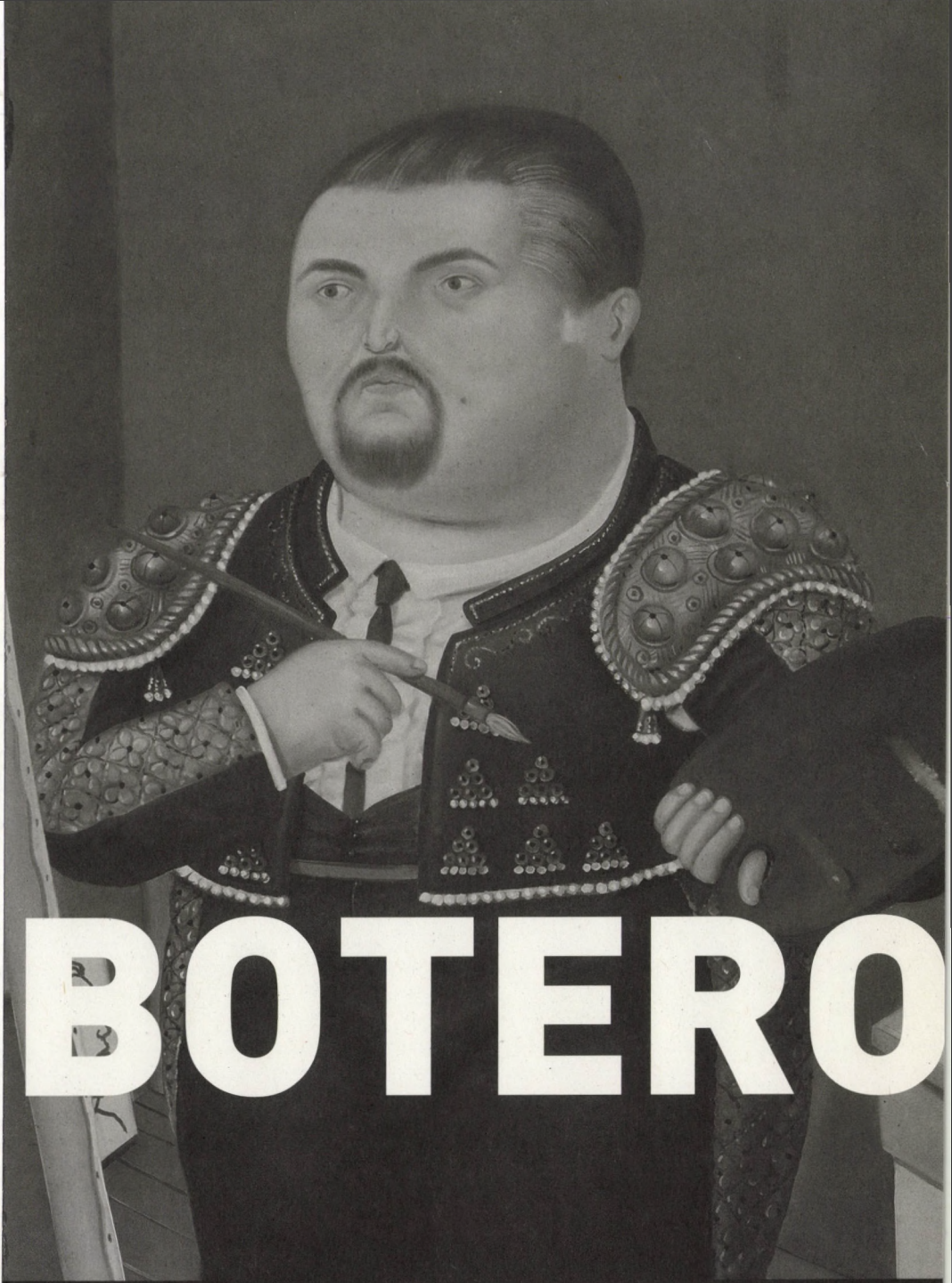
school tuition for educational films. According to the decree, this small fee was recommended for church- and privately-owned schools, too.

In 1935 Hungary, at the Department's suggestion, signed a League of Nations' initiative of 1933 to abolish customs duty on educational films. It was signed by 18 member countries altogether. According to the treaty, all educational films approved by the International Educational Cinematographic Institution of Rome were exempted of customs duty in trade within the 18 signatory countries.

The head of the Department was Lajos Geszti, a former secondary school teacher. His major duty was to order, produce and preview the screening of the films. Schools called for tenders for the purchase of narrow-film projectors and advertised and held operator training sessions for the selected teachers. There were 500 teacher applicants for the first training course in 1934. The Department was also responsible for fire prevention measures in the schools.

In the 1936–37 academic year film education classes took place in around 400 secondary schools in the country. The teachers chose from among 102 films (approximately 2,000 copies of these films were available), thirty per cent of which were made in Hungary. In 1939 and 1940, respectively, 51 and 26 Hungarian films were produced each year. In comparison, there were no more than two films made during the same period in Sweden. Until 1943, film education was extended to almost all secondary schools. Before the German occupation, one of 332 educational films was screened every day in Hungary for fifteen to twenty thousand pupils at approximately one thousand schools.

Hungarian educational films had many positive effects. The pupils learning abilities, especially in the natural sciences, were improved. Thanks to the successful programme, the 16-mm film industry boomed in Hungary, and the production of projectors and films also increased. Theatres projecting 16-mm film became even more popular in this period and 16 mm-newsreels were shown in cinemas. Finally this period also paved the way for the birth of a new film genre, the "science documentary," which evolved significantly in the decades to come. ❧



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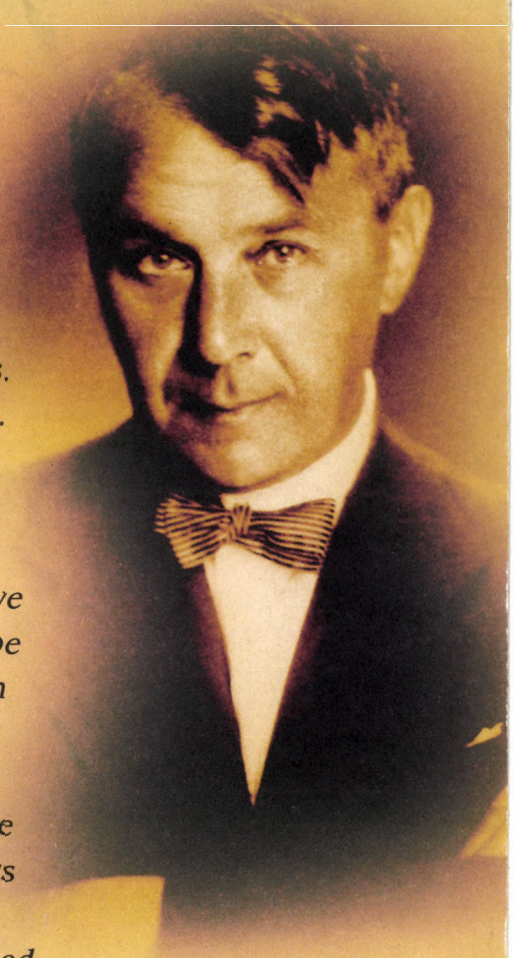

As usual, he hopped up on the train at the last moment. He tossed his suitcase into one of the compartments. The wheels began to trundle down the tracks.

It was a dark winter afternoon.

He gazed out of the window drowsily, his eyes bloodshot from his vigils. He gazed at the fields of snow, the rooks fluttering above them, a black and white landscape painting, then yawned, his mouth gaping wide as if he wanted to swallow the whole thing, drew the curtain so as not to have to see anything, and, as he always did when something new lay before him or something completed behind him, he lit up.

On this occasion his trip lay before him, and boarding and departure behind him. So as soon as he had smoked his first cigarette, he lit a second.

He was journeying to a town in the countryside to give a reading.

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by Dezső Kosztolányi

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